

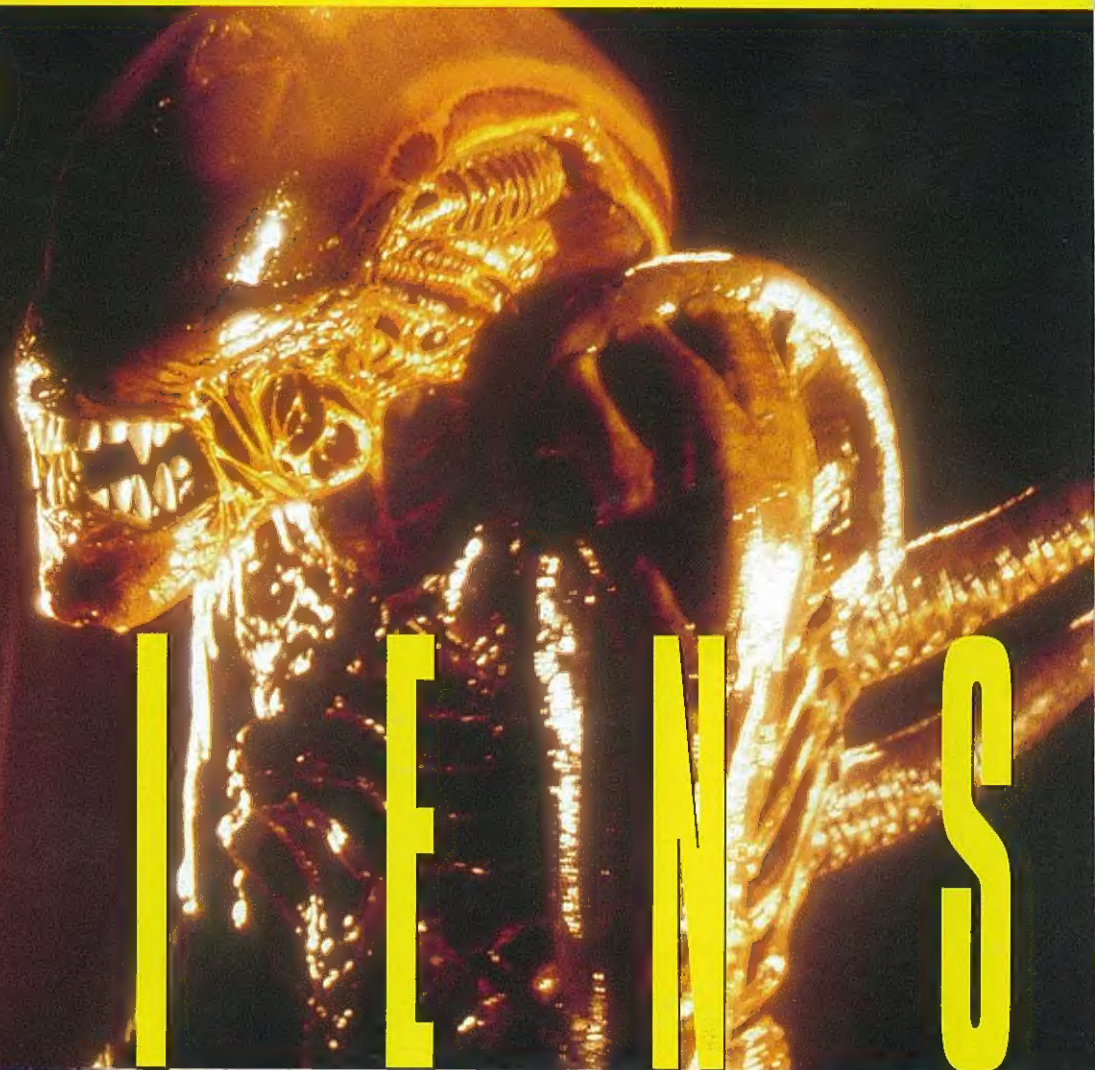
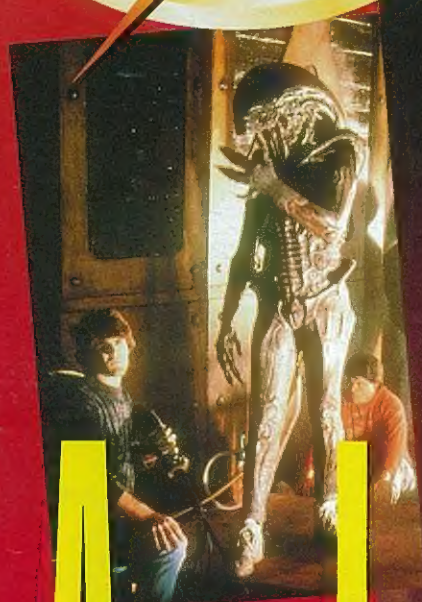
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# ***“Mr. Savini, I Am One of Your Biggest Fans...”***

**The Tom Savini story—part two**  
**Interview and photographs by Lee Shargel**



**■ ■ ■ ■ ■ A**s Tom and I continued our conversation, he began to relate an unusual story to me. It was prompted by my asking him about his attitude towards his many fans and admirers. I asked the question because it seemed, at least to me, that he never grew tired of answering the same questions and signing autographs by the hundreds. Where most celebrities would be ducking out a side door by this time (six hours), Tom went on without let up. His answer to my question was honest and to the point. “I was at a Monster convention in California quite a few years ago and it was there that I learned a valuable lesson about this business and the fans who make it possible for me to even be here.

“I was seated in my booth signing autographs when this young kid walks up and says, ‘Mr. Savini, I am one of your biggest fans. I work in a video store in Manhattan Beach (California) and I was wondering if you could stop by and sign the VHS boxes of some of your movies.’ I thought, what the hell, and I went. That kid turned out to be Quentin Tarantino. Since that day I treat every fan like he or she might be the next Quentin. You never know.”

Tom told me that, since that meeting, Quentin has purchased the video store he once worked at and the movie theater on the same street. Tom said, “I am always accommodating to all of my fans. After all, without them,





where would I be? I never would have landed the role of *Sex Machine* in **From Dusk 'Til Dawn** if it hadn't been for him, but that's another story."

Currently, Tom is engaged in the design of a new theme nightclub in the city of Pittsburgh, Pa. This project might seem a long way from motion pictures but, as Tom explains it, this is just another medium that will use his special effects talents to the max. The restaurant is called *Area 51*, named after the famous (and non-existent) U.S. Air Force research center in Nevada.

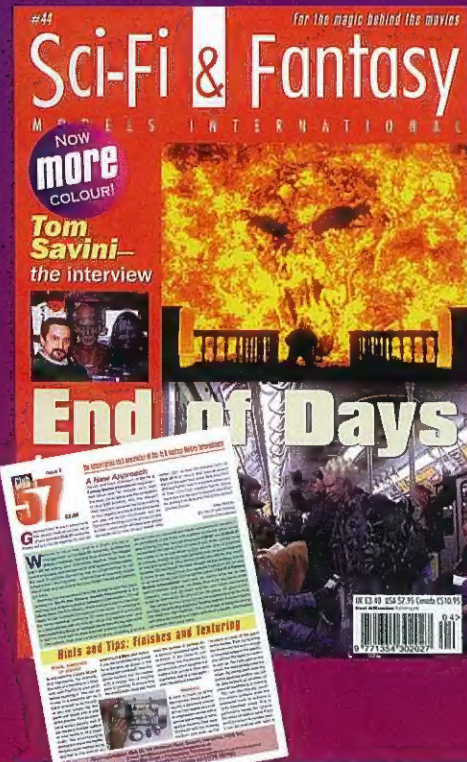
Tom says, "I am creating an entire sci-fi themed environment where visitors will be thrilled the moment they walk in the door. There will be special effects, sights and sounds to rival any theme park ride. And the food is good, too. This is a great opportunity for me to create effects that will continue thrilling guests day after day and night after night. It's an exciting project."

...continued page 8.



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# From the editorial desk

## Listen up, Alien fans... (this is important!)

**W**e squeezed. We pushed. We pulled. We tore out our hair and called our computer monitors unspeakable names. It made no difference. Our contributors had come up with *so much* brilliant material for this issue's *Aliens Collector Special* there was simply no way we could shoehorn it all into just one special edition. Finally, we had an idea... Why not make it *TWO* special issues, allowing us to do justice to the amazing words and pictures our people had generated?

That, then, is exactly what we've done.

Issue 48 of this magazine (three issues down the line from now) will be our *Alien Collector Special Issue* number *TWO*, bringing you more never before seen photographs and never before submitted facts in an exclusive themed section.

As with this issue, our second *Aliens Collector Special* will only be published *once*. Once it's gone, it's gone, so the time to subscribe/order a copy from your newsagent is *now*, people.

For a sneak peak at what's coming up over the next few issues of this magazine check out our 'forthcoming attractions' spot on page 13.

*Right*—I'd better get out of the way now to make way for those amazing words and pics.

See you in issue 46.

Thank you, as always, for reading!  
Michael G. Reccia  
Editor.

P.S. Our regular news section will return next issue...



Bob Skotak and Pat McClung add detail to the *Sulaco*.

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Publishers	Michael G. Reccia David Openshaw
Editor	Michael G. Reccia
Club 57 Editor	Bob Gould
Art and Production	David Openshaw
Photography	Tim Hooper
Kits/Special Projects	Bob Gould
Make-Up/Creature FX	Karl Derrick
Shepperton/Pinewood	Geoff Topping
Distribution	Tom Brown 01778 391135
Subscription Enquiries	Collette and Tina Tel: 01778 391180 01778 391155 Fax: 01778 393668

Contributors this issue: Simon Roykirk  
Tom Savini • Darrel Simmonds  
Alien Special: Chris Chulamanis  
Harry Harris • Lee Shargel  
Paul Taglianetti • Geoff Topping

### Web

[www.sci-fi-and-fantasy-models.com](http://www.sci-fi-and-fantasy-models.com)  
Managed by Stuart Sumpter of SASNet  
e-mail [stuart.sumpter@dial.pipex.com](mailto:stuart.sumpter@dial.pipex.com)

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## GERRY ANDERSON

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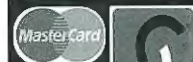
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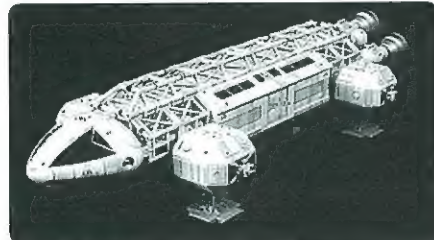
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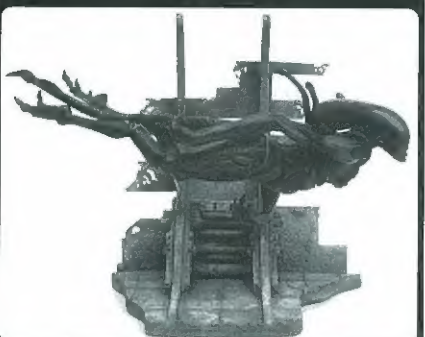
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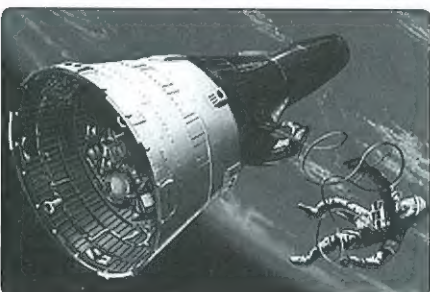
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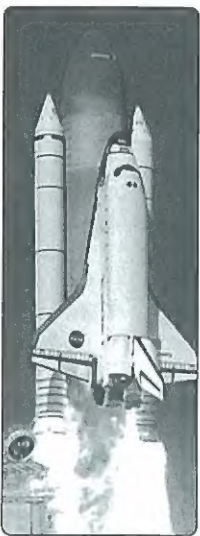


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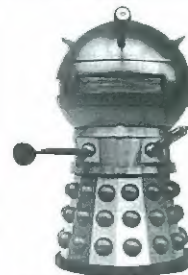


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# Mr. Savini, I Am One of Your Biggest Fans...

...continued from page 3.

## Good Director, Bad Director...

Most of the time a script will not spell out in detail what shape the special make-up effects should take. It is often up to the director and his or her interpretation of the story to determine how it will look on the screen. Unfortunately, more often than not, the effects turn out to be a bit cheesy. Not so with a Savini movie. Tom: "Many times I will suggest to the director how I think an effect should

He would spell it out for everyone. 'I want the camera here and the girl to slide down over there and then swing the camera around so we can get this shot of her in the foreground...' And so on.

"But everyone kept coming up to him and suggesting, 'How about if we do this or how about if we try that?' Toby would listen for hours on end while the whole crew (still being paid) stood around with their fingers in their noses, waiting. So they



look. Even if I am not sure how in the world I will do it, I always have an idea and I have always figured it out. Sometimes it may be just re-creating something I have already done and adding a twist here and there. Or, I may have to invent an effect that has never been done before. One way or the other, I have always come through. A good director listens to his crew. That includes the actors, best boy, set decorators, even the caterer. He doesn't always do what they ask, but a good director listens.

"Sometimes he may use something that was suggested, and sometimes that may backfire if the director listens to the ideas of everyone on the set. A good example of a good director who fell into the bad director trap is Tobe Hooper, director of **Texas Chainsaw Massacre II**. He would walk out onto the set knowing exactly what he wanted in the shot.

brought in the second unit director, a guy named Newt Arnold. Now this guy I dubbed 'The Movie Nazi!' He was a no nonsense dictator-director. He was tremendous and, believe it or not, I learned a lot from this guy. He was a muscle-bound behemoth with a bald head and a black patch over one eye. He would come out and tell everyone what he wanted and that was that. If anyone came up to him with a suggestion he would just tell them, 'No! It's my turn! Go do what I said.' Later, he would ask them what it was they wanted to ask him. Sometimes he would use the suggestion for another shot. He would get 30 set-ups a day in the can. Doing it his way got the second unit elements done. It was the best directing lesson I had ever got up to that point in my career. Now I use some of what I learned from him when I'm directing a film. I listen, too, but only after I get done what I have

to. If the suggestion is a good one, I'll use it. If not, I still give ear to what people have to say, but on their nickel, not the producer's."

Tom's debut as the director of special effects was on the movie **Deranged**. It was the true story of serial killer Ed Gein. The movie was being done by the same people he did **Death Dreams** for, Alan Ormsby and Bob Clark. On the movie **Death Dreams** Bob was the director and Alan was the writer and the make-up artist. Tom was Alan's assistant. On **Deranged**, Alan Ormsby was the director, Bob Clark was the producer and Tom Savini was the director of special effects. As Tom explains it, making **Deranged** was an excersize in macabre creativity and creative accounting, that is, making the most of your special effects materials with a very low budget. This is also a good lesson for those budding special effects artists out there who would like to emulate the master, Tom Savini.

In order to create the effects required for the film, they had to make bodies out of chicken wire and raid every hobby and magic store in town for skull kits and cheap make-up supplies. Whatever they could find for as little as was required to pay for it. Tom remembers, "I learned more of how to create special make-up effects on this film than anything else I had ever done. And it was due to the fact that we had a very small budget for make-up effects that drove me to invent new ways of doing things and still make them believable on camera. That was really the fun of it. I had to make due with what was available. It was on **Deranged** that I really began inventing new ways for creating realistic looking skin effects.

"For example, the director was calling for a *belly drum*, because Ed Gein would make drums out of the belly skin of his victims. (*Gross me out! LS*) I would paint latex on a piece of glass, color it intrinsically and stretch it across a drum. It looked just like the real thing. There was no precedent for the things we did in those days so we had to invent and that was the fun in all of this."

## Blood, Blood and More Blood—Friday the 13th

As Tom Savini was honing his craft it became more and more evident that many of the effects required in his films just did not exist. So, necessity





being the mother of invention, Tom was moved to invent new and more realistic make-up effects with each new project. Now most people might not notice this effect in films that require much bloodletting, but not Tom. Realism is his catch phrase.

The more an effect looks real, the more the audience will appreciate the effort that went into creating it. And most directors agree. If the end result is scaring the socks off of moviegoers, then Tom Savini is responsible for more lost socks in movie theaters than any special effects artist around. As Tom puts it, "I didn't know a good blood formula until **Friday the 13th**.

"That was when I called Dick Smith. In my opinion, he is one of the greatest make-up artists living today. He has created what I consider to be one of the greatest training courses in make-up. It's a correspondence course that has 20 volumes and tapes and slides. Every make-up artist has the Dick Smith course as the definitive reference on make-up application. Some people now go to make-up schools because they need to have an instructor look over their shoulder in order to learn first hand how it's done. In fact that's why I have started my own school for special effects make-up. It will be opening near Pittsburgh in the fall of this year."

During filming of **Friday the 13th** in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania, Tom called Dick Smith,

who lived in the area. Dick was kind enough to invite Tom to his home and, over the course of several hours, gave him the formulas for making realistic blood, foam latex and gelatin appliances. For hours and hours, Dick Smith shared his secrets with Tom who, in turn, went on to improve them even more. Tom said that, back in the sixties, there really wasn't anywhere to go to learn this stuff so by watching, sharing and experimenting, he invented many of the effects we see on the screen today. On the movie **Deranged**, Tom used red food coloring, peanut butter and flour as the main ingredients for movie blood. But he never liked the overall effect. He kept trying new ideas, experimenting, like some weird special effects *Dr. Frankenstein*, looking to create something that would seem 'Alive!' on screen.

So, what *is* Tom Savini's secret formula for realistic blood, you ask? Okay, Okay, here it is—the real secret is that Tom uses Dick Smith's formula: Karo Corn Syrup, Red and Yellow food coloring, water and, if it's going to be on white clothing, you add 32 drops of green for every gallon of blood. This is a very important ingredient. Tom says that just about every original technique in make-up materials was invented by Dick Smith.

Tom is always ready with praise for the other titans of special effects that have in many ways influenced his own creativity. Pioneers from the silent era such as Bill Tuttle, Jack

Pierce (**Frankenstein**) and today's masters like Rick Baker, Stan Winston, Rob Bottin and Stuart Freeborn (the apes in **2001**). Tom's book, *Grand Illusions*, is dedicated to all of these pioneers of special effects.

### So You Want To Be A Special Effects Artist

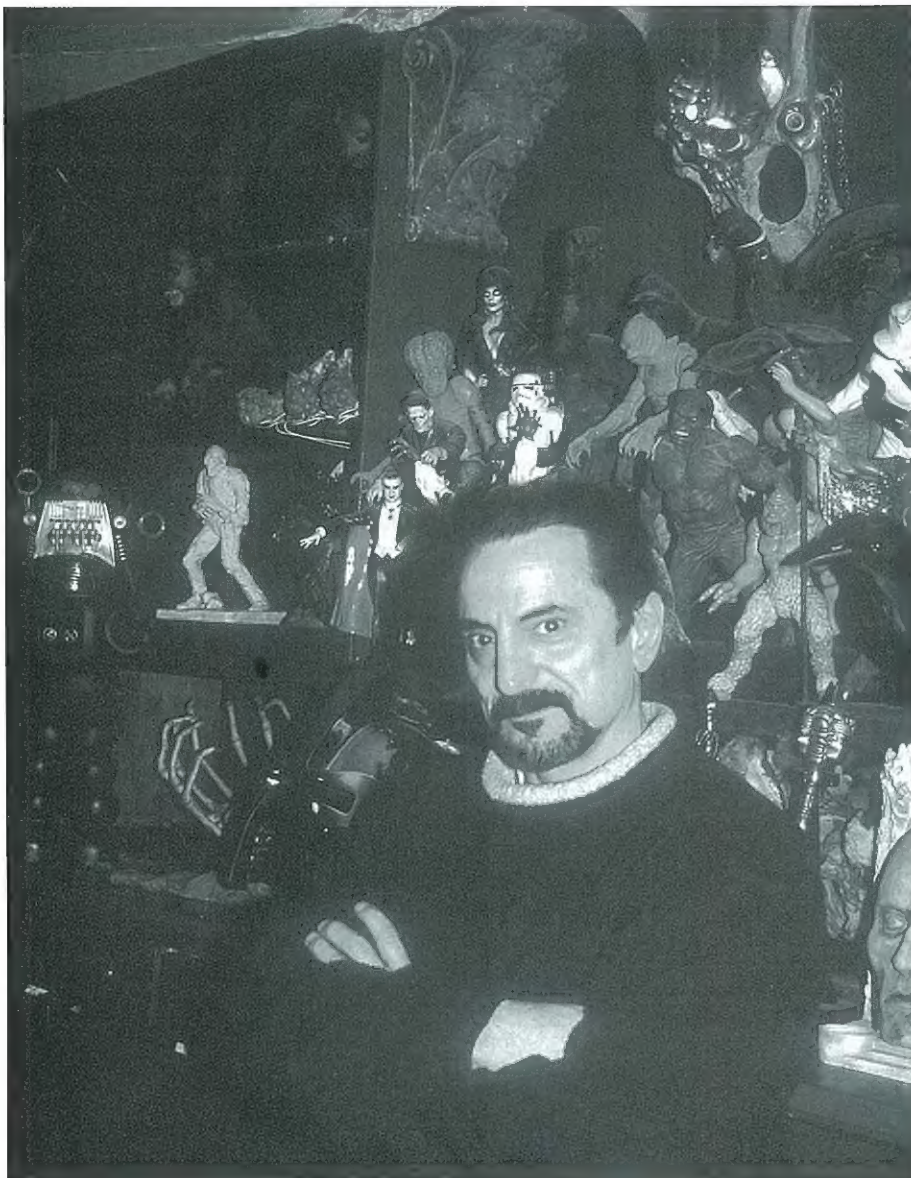
I was amazed as I sat there watching fan after fan step up to Tom's booth wanting to purchase an autographed photo or have one taken with the master. But, more often than not, I noticed young and old special effects artist wannabees, prodding Tom for what they thought would be a secret of the art spelled out before them in plain English. But as Tom explains it, there is quite a lot more to it than just a few words over a convention booth counter. It takes a great deal of practice and skill to become a respected special effects make-up artist.

Tom receives tons of fan mail and thousands of e-mails through his official web-site ([www.savini.com](http://www.savini.com)) every week. Many of his admirers think that all it takes is gluing a little foam from the living room couch on your face and pouring ketchup on it and you're a make-up artist. There is so much more to it. At least now, as opposed to when Tom Savini first started, future make-up and special effects artists have a wealth of materials to learn from and schools they can go to, offering courses in movie make-up and special effects. Tom: "If you really want to learn good make-up effects you have to learn to be a good sculptor, painter and mold-maker. And it takes lots of practice and trial and error to be good at it."

Probably the best place to start would be a library or book store. You could also surf the internet. There is a wealth of information out there.

Another really good source for info on make-up special effects and materials can be found at: [www.burmanfoam.com](http://www.burmanfoam.com). This is the *Burman Industries* web site where you can access their entire catalog of books, tapes and special effects materials used by everyone in the business. Then there is Joe Blascoe's school in Orlando, Florida. Tom Savini states, "The important thing is to learn this stuff; all of it. Then photograph everything you create and start to build a portfolio of your work. When you think you are ready, go for it and plop that portfolio in





front of the person who can hire you." Yes, it's that simple. Of course, you need to be aware of the fact that most of the people who will hire you are in California. Yep! I mean Hollywood.

### **Making the Effects that Make the Monster**

I asked Tom what exactly goes into making the special effects for a movie. How does he get his ideas for a certain effect, mask or appliance? If a film calls for a certain look what goes into creating it? As Tom explained it, there is much more to creating a monster than meets the eye. The process of creating motion picture special make-up effects can take many forms. It usually begins with Tom receiving a copy of the script. He will study it and break it down into a sequence of special effects shots or scenes required for the movie. He will then make several sketches of what he feels the effect should look like.

From the sketches, Tom begins his creation in his Pittsburgh studio. Often times the actors will go there to be fitted with appliances, have body or head casts made and any special make-up that may be required for the shoot. On other occasions the actors may have the same preliminary work completed at another studio and the molds will then be forwarded on to Tom's studio for completion. On yet other occasions, as in **Killing Zoe**, which was shot in France, they were already two weeks into the shoot when they called Tom to the set.

He just had time to grab his make-up case and he was off. "As far as I was concerned, working out of my case on the effects for **Killing Zoe** was the most fun of all. It was just like Halloween. I felt like a kid again on that shoot."

I wondered how much influence

the director has on the look or feel of a certain effect. Tom said that more often than not the director hasn't got a clue that they are making magic tricks. The director most often relies on the guys doing the effects to come up with something unique. Tom says, "Most directors have no idea what they want. They think special effects are magic and the people that create them are the special effects magicians. And that's fine with me. For example, I will tell a director that he will need this shot first, before the effects shot, in order for it to be most effective. On **Friday the 13th**, the director wanted this ax to go into this woman's head. Fine, I said, but before you cleave her head in two, you need to have a shot of the ax hitting a wall or smashing a light in order to set up the audience into feeling that the ax is real. That it has some weight and some steely substance. Now when the rubber ax hits her, you think it's a real one. The director liked that idea so he used it. The real magic to special effects in any movie is that it needs something before and something after in order to make the effect believable. Now on the film, **Killing Zoe**, I was working from the make-up kit. One shot called for the actor to be burned alive. Usually I would make a cast of the actor and create a latex mask from that. On that film I just had no time. The way I see it, limitations always make you more creative.

"I had to create a look of burned flesh and I only had one day to do it. How was I going to do this? Well, I just used a new technique that had to be developed on the spot. I took some fabric and pulled his nose way up here and pulled his lower lip and glued it way down there (Tom imitates the grotesque effect) and that was on half of his face. I mixed in some blood with black powder and that was that. I suggested that the director first take a shot of the normal side of his face and then have the actor slowly turn toward the camera and show the burned side.

"It worked out better than if I had spent two weeks in the studio creating a burn mask. The director loved the effect. It just goes to show you that one person (the director in this case) can't think of everything."

*Lee Shargel's exclusive interview with Tim Savini continues next issue.*

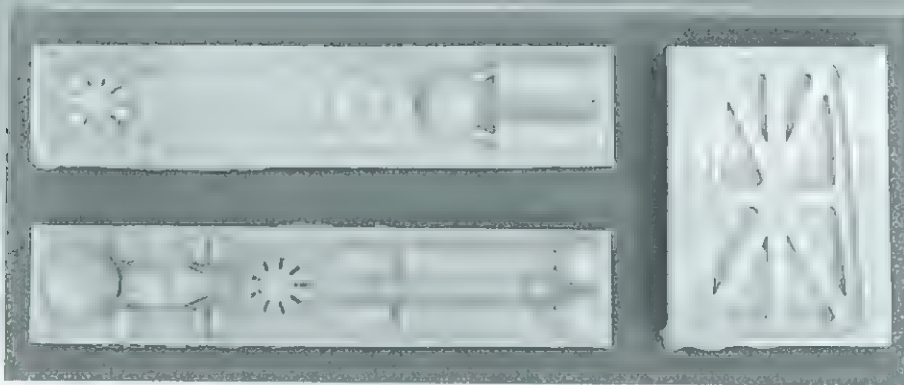


# Giant!

## The making of A-B Models' mammoth 44" Space:1999 Eagle

### Part two: assembling the walkways

simon roykirk



Walkway shelf (top and bottom) and walkway door end piece.



Walkway core—a simple block of wood.

**O**ne of the things that 'sold' the Space:1999 Eagle Transporter as a 'real' spaceship was its *functionality - the way that, from every angle, it looked as though it had actually been designed by engineers living just five minutes into the future and bolted together as a modular unit to work in space. Some of its intricate detailing was only seen fleetingly, as was the case with the 'walkways' that sit inside the frameworks that run back from the beak and forwards from the engines to meet the central pod, but the fact that they were there, and could be intriguingly glimpsed through the latticework surrounding them, added greatly to the authenticity of the craft...*

In this second installment of the making of A-B Models' gigantic (44") Eagle kit we will cover the assembly of these little seen but extremely important components.

**Parts required from kit:** Front/rear walkway (central core) x 2 (wood); front/rear walkway door x 4; front/rear walkway top panel x 2; front/rear walkway bottom panel x 2; front/rear walkway left/right side panel x 4; walkway 'shelf' detail upper x 4; walkway 'shelf' detail (lower) x 4 (all resin).

### Stage two—Walkways

The Eagle's walkways are simple rectangular corridors with a sliding

door at each end which—in theory—connect the *beak* with the central *pod* and central *pod* with the rear engines (see footnote). On the 44" studio miniatures these areas were liberally covered with kit-bashed detailing and EMA domes and suitably dirtied down to give a 'busy' look to the sections.

### Doors

A-B's new kit provides two blocks of wood, pre-cut to size, as the 'cores' of the two *walkway* sections. The first step in assembling these is to epoxy the four resin door end pieces in place at either end of each of the two blocks (making sure that each door is *the same way up*, of course!). There is

a slight overlap to each door piece, so I took some time adjusting them whilst the epoxy was still tacky to make sure each door was lined up centrally before it set in place. Once the doors were firmly in position I used the *Dremel* with sanding attachment (what a handy little gizmo this is!) followed by a finishing off with sandpaper and elbow grease to pare down the edges of the resin door pieces until each piece was flush with the block it was now attached to.

### Leg pod slots

The walkways also served as an 'anchor' to hold the studio Eagles' removable *leg pods* in place. On the large miniatures the pods were simply pushed into the central walkways, locating via a spar leading from the inside face of each pod which slotted through the surrounding latticework and into a rectangular hole in the walkways. A-B's Eagle follows this assembly method, meaning the holes to accept the heavy resin spars that are moulded to the inner faces of the leg pods need to be drilled through the wooden blocks.

A supplied diagram shows the correct orientation of the walkways' resin side panels. These incorporate cut-out rectangular holes and, once positioned against the sides of the



**Time check (hours):**

Cleaning up resin parts with scalpel and needle files: 1.

Marking and drilling holes in wooden cores: 2.

Applying and sanding 'cladding' pieces: 1.

Filling and sanding joins: 1½.

Assembling and filling 'shelves': 1.

Total first stage: 6½.

**Skill check (techniques needed):**

drilling; routing; filing; filling; sanding.

**Safety check:**

Quality vapour and dust mask essential when working with resin and white metal. Protective goggles required when drilling.

blocks, indicate the places where holes need to be drilled through the wood. The roughly rectangular openings in the blocks need to be slightly larger than the holes in the side panels so their corners don't snag on the L-shaped plastic strips which will be added later and which sit against the corners of the rectangular cut-outs in the panels (all will become clear—*honest*).

Creating the openings in the blocks was a matter of first marking out rectangles on their sides by holding the side panels in position and drawing through and within their cutouts, then adding a couple of millimetres to the resulting shapes on the blocks all round in pen. I then placed each block on the drill stand and, using a 3mm bit, drilled a series of holes close to each other just within the borders of the marked rectangles from both sides of the blocks. It was then a



Door end pieces in place and leg pod support cavity position marked prior to drilling (see below).



matter of dragging the drill bit between the drilled holes and levering out the resulting separated chunks of wood from the openings. The holes were evened up and smoothed out by using the *Dremel* with a large routing attachment. I frequently checked that I had

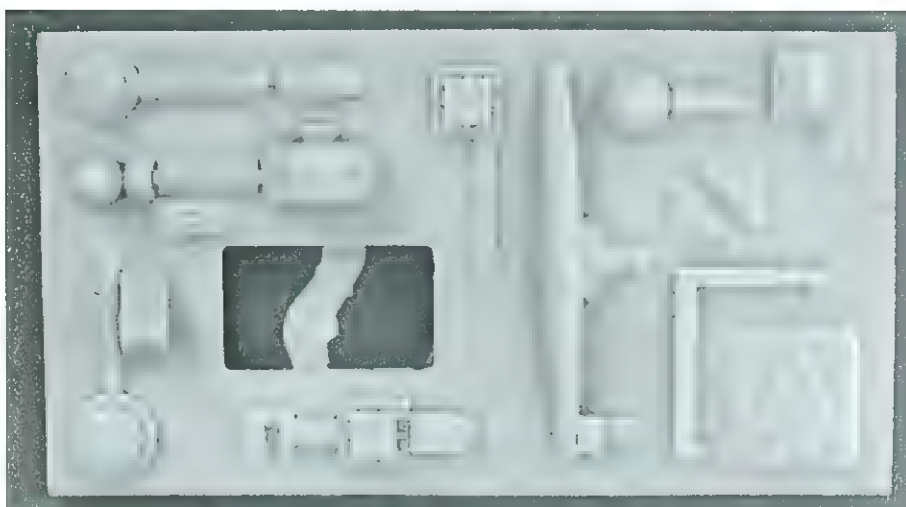
removed sufficient material by offering up the side panels to the blocks, holding them up to the light and peering through the holes to make certain they were larger than those that are pre-cut into the resin panels.

**Cladding the walkways**

Once I was happy with the openings in my wooden blocks I began to apply the remaining 'resin 'cladding' pieces to them. The walkway tops and bottoms needed to be epoxied in place first as their edges required trimming back to the width of the wooden blocks before the side panels could be added. With the side pieces finally glued in position I mixed a generous amount of *P38 Easy Sand* car filler and smeared it into all the gaps between the pieces with a finger. Once everything had set I sanded the edges until I had smooth joins on each face of the walkways.

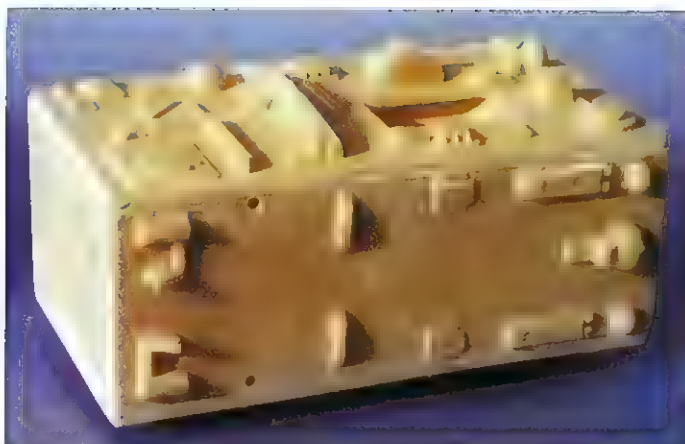
**Side 'shelves'**

The walkway 'shelves' (as they are



Side panel prior to cleaning up.





Completed and filled walkway section prior to priming and painting.

described in the instructions) are the long oblongs of kit-bashed strip that run parallel to and at a 90 degree angle from the walkways on either side to conceal the spars from the leg pods. These make up from two resin pieces each (eight pieces in all) and were simply epoxied together then, once dry, filled and sanded so that all joins were smooth and unnoticeable.

The final operation on this section was to drill 3mm diameter holes through the pre-marked indents on

the bottoms of the walkways on the drill stand. These openings will accept the screws that hold the underside engines in place at a later stage.

...And that's it for this issue. Next time we tackle the rather more complex leg pod, leg and foot assemblies. Join me on *Alpha* for more *Eagle*-making next issue.

*Footnote: I've been familiar with the layout of the Eagle for some twenty eight years, and long ago realised*

*that the live action cockpit and miniature beak bear no resemblance to each other dimensionally. It was only recently, however, that, prompted by a reader's observations, it dawned on me that there is nowhere for the doors in the walkways to go when they open. They are shown to be sliding doors on the live action set, but the width of the slender central walkways makes no allowance either side of the door for it to slide aside!...*

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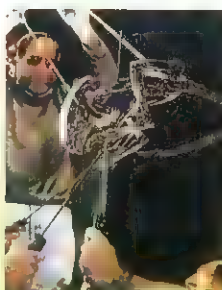
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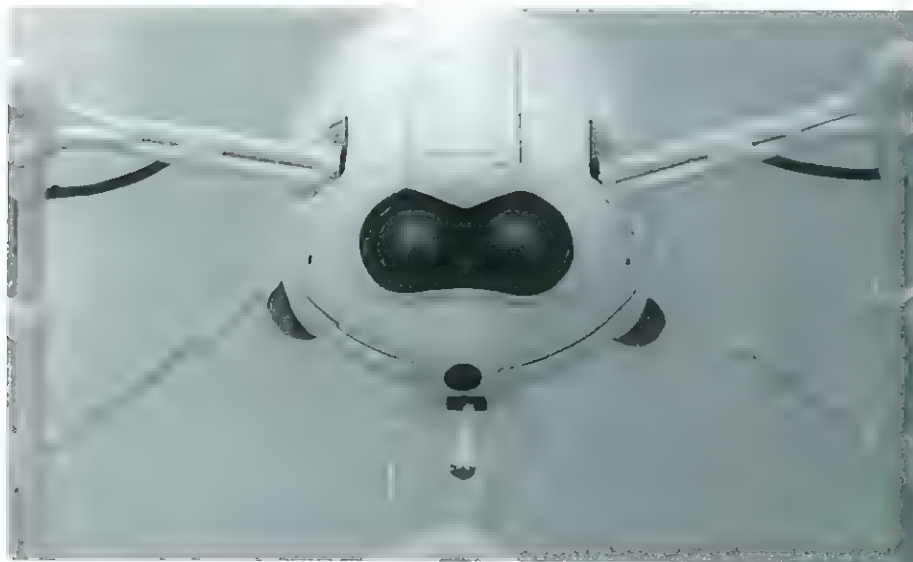
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# “The chances of anything coming from Mars...”

Darrell Simmonds builds Comet's new Martian Fighting Machine



“...are a million to one,” he said. But still they come.—*Jeff Wayne's all time classic War of the Worlds double album (based, of course, upon H. G. Wells' chilling novel) featured not only superb tracks, but also excellent cover art plus an illustrated booklet containing graphic scenes of Victorian Britain's destruction by the all-conquering Martians and their invincible tripod fighting machines.*

The review kit of *Comet Miniatures'* retooled 13" tall *Martian Fighting Machine*—based on the craft depicted in those illustrations—arrived hot from the red planet in a variety of white metal and resin parts comprising a resin body; tripod legs that make up from upper and lower pieces plus overhanging ‘supports’; resin feet; white metal aerials; a ‘heat ray’; a length of wire; ‘hydraulic piping’ and ‘leg stabilising struts’ that are an ingenious combination of white metal castings and a resin sheath.

## Construction

The first step was the mandatory scrubbing of all parts in hot, soapy water with an old toothbrush. Once the pieces had dried I drilled locating

holes to accommodate the ends of the stabilising struts in the leg uppers and the side pods on the body. The detailing on the white metal parts was sharpened up via careful use of needle files. The end tabs allowing each leg support to connect with the body are square rather than round and therefore needed to be rounded off with a needle file before they would sit properly in the locating holes I had drilled (at a slight downward angle to allow for correct orientation of the legs) into the body.

At this stage the upper and lower leg parts were joined together. These require careful drilling and pinning. I used a 5mm drill bit and inserted lengths of brass rod -epoxied in place—into the resulting holes.



The three-pronged feet could now be added. To ensure the *Fighting Machine* stands correctly it is best to test-fit the craft on its feet (note: as per the instructions, these line up





with the front of the *Machine* in an 'open' Y configuration) on a level surface before applying the glue. This way you can adjust the stance until you are happy, making absolutely sure your kit doesn't suffer from annoying 'coffee-table-with-one-leg-shorter-than-the-rest-rocking-syndrome'.

The white metal aerials were cleaned up and the two that sit at the front gripped in a small pair of pliers and carefully bent to match the angles shown in the instructions. Lengths of the supplied wire (approx 1cm) were then added to the ends. Finally, a hole for the heat ray was drilled in the body and the piece was inserted in the front lower section of the 'nose'. Upon cutting the hydraulic piping supplied into lengths (these sit within the angles formed between the leg supports and the legs themselves) I discovered that there was only enough material for two and a half pieces. I therefore made up a third length from a piece of solder.

### Painting

The instructions suggest an overall colour scheme of white or silver. Referring to the illustrations in the album booklet I chose the former, spraying the complete vehicle with primer followed by a coat of gloss white. The cockpit surround, leg 'wells' and the indent on the nose



were then picked out in matt black; the bug-like cockpit 'eyes' finished in *Humbrol* metallic green (50); the ray emitters (?) in *Humbrol* metallic red (51); the lower leg struts in *Humbrol* silver, and the tip of the heat gun on the nose painted silver with an overbrushing of *Humbrol* orange (82). Finally, a pencil was used to highlight some of the panel lines. My menacing *Martian Fighting Machine* was complete.

### Conclusions

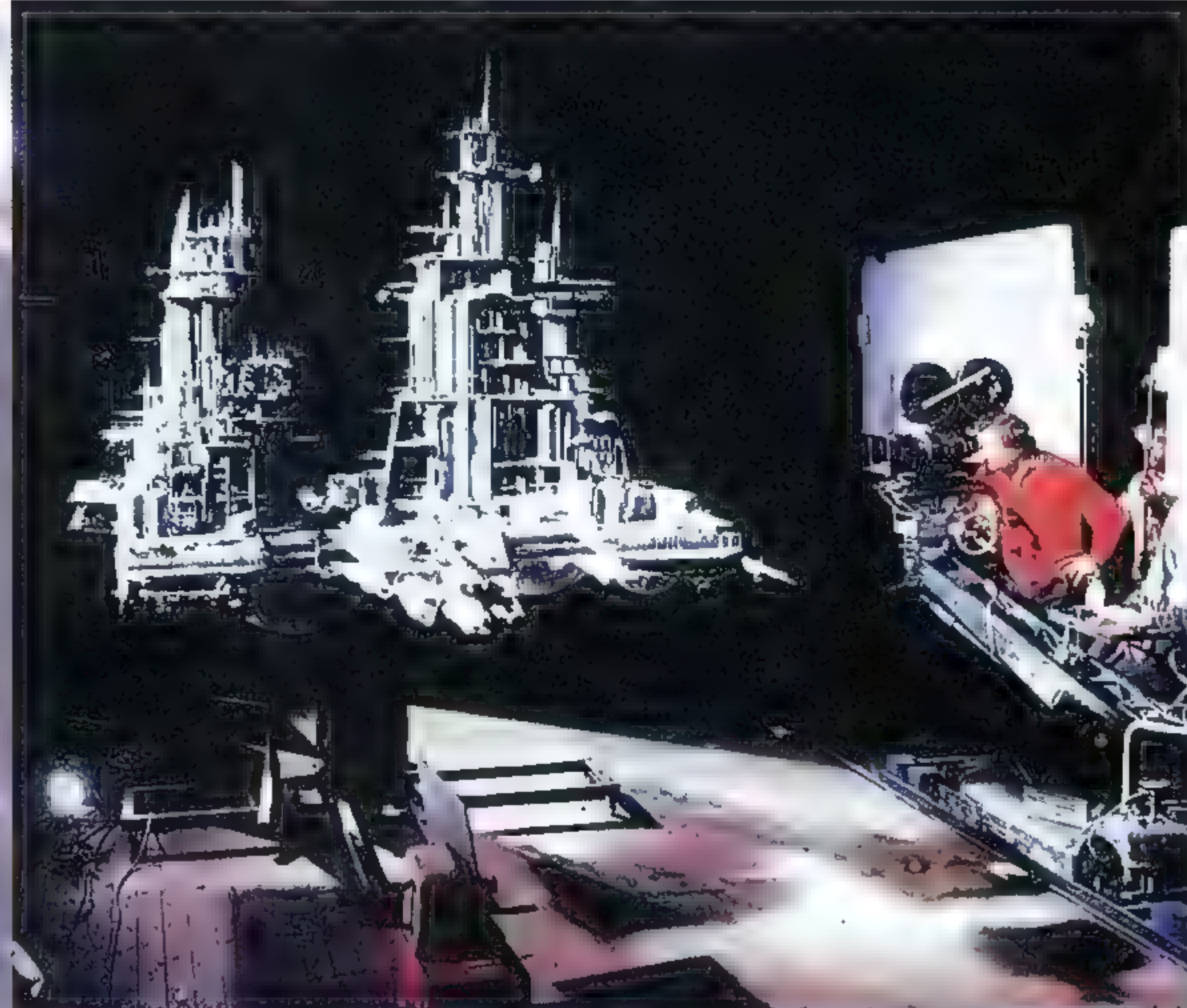
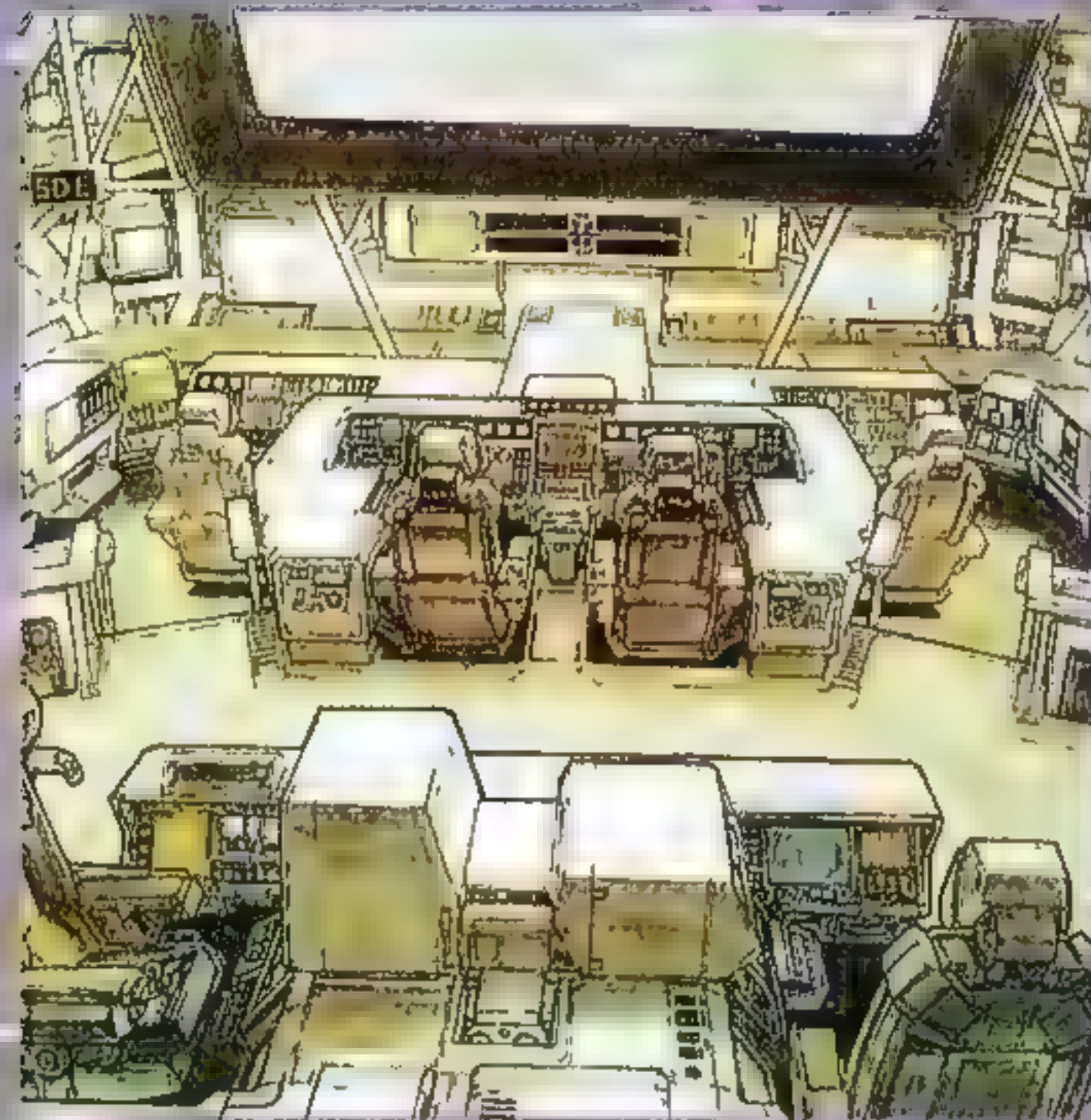
- Resin castings are crisp and clean—*excellent*, in fact.
- White metal castings—could be cleaner, but twenty minutes with a needle file quickly sorts them out.
- Assembly—straightforward and very good.
- Instructions—adequate but basic—could be a little better.
- Price (£27.50)—excellent value.
- Look of finished kit—unusual and impressive.







Nostromo bridge (above) and cockpit design (below) by Ron Cobb. Right: Nostromo refinery miniature being filmed.



# the mother of them all

## Creating the gothic high tech horror of Alien

paul taglianetti

**L**ooking back on *Alien* some twenty years after its original release, one can't help notice (excepting one quite famous dinner scene) how bloodless and tightly paced the film is. Compared to the current crop of celluloid thrillers, the movie is positively stoic. A brilliant fusion of gothic horror and high tech action, *Alien* remains one of the most popular films of the genre...

Released by 20th Century Fox in May, 1979, almost two years exactly after the release of *Star Wars*, *Alien* was greeted with mild indifference by the critics (*Time* reviewer Frank Rich cited the feature as 'depressing to watch' and 'an expensive movie that never soars beyond its cold desire to score the big bucks—it just shovels on the mayhem') and respectable business at the box office. Backed by a cryptic and unusual ad campaign, *Alien* burst upon audiences that summer not unlike the film's titular Creature.

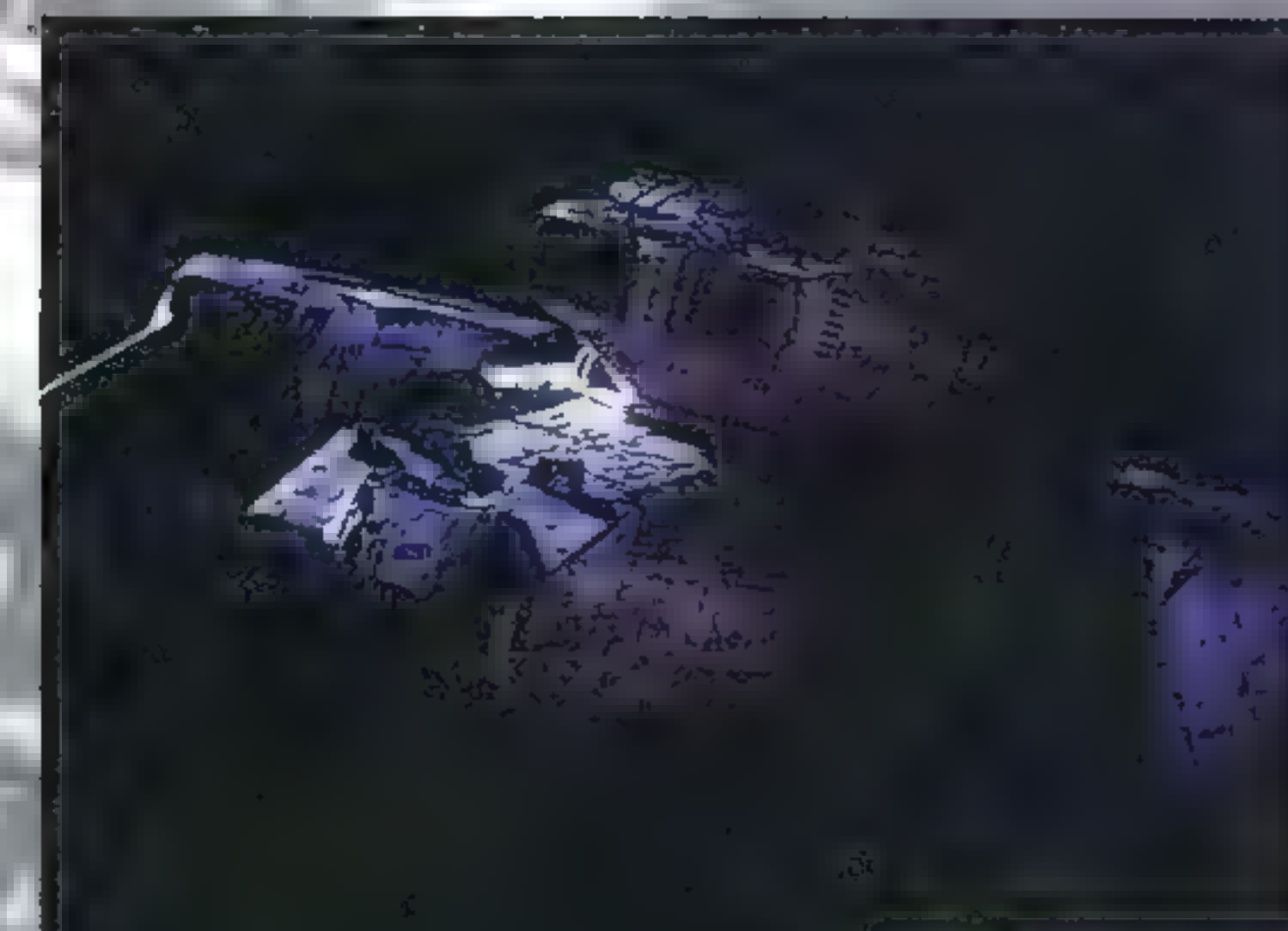
Yet, over two decades after its original release, it is as gripping and exciting as the day it was first released. Many directors, amongst them James Cameron, Paul Verhoeven and Larry and Andy Wachowski, owe a great deal of salutation to Ridley Scott's brilliant atmospheric sci-fi adventure. Like *King Kong* some 50 years earlier, many artists involved with the

film may lay claim to the title of father to the film's shape-shifting Creature, but there is little dispute that the driving creative force behind the project was director Ridley Scott. A graduate of the UK's Royal College of Art, Scott eventually became a well-known director of stylish TV commercials. In 1977 he directed *The Duelists* for producer David Putnam, which won the special Jury Prize at the Cannes film festival that year. Scott's directorial style had an acute visual flair that caught the attention of Gordon Carroll and his partners and Scott was brought on to oversee the picture. O'Bannon, while never a serious contender for the director spot, was given a position as visual consultant on the film. His input and suggestion of designs would have a great and lasting input on not only this film but also the others that followed.

*Alien* takes place almost exclusively aboard the gigantic mineral towing vessel *Nostromo*. While returning home from an ore gathering mission, the ship's on board computer intercepts a transmission emanating from a nearby planetoid. Ultimately the crew lands to investigate and inadvertently bring aboard a lethal *Alien* organism. One by one the crew fall prey to the lethal and elegant entity.

### The Writers

The genesis of *Alien* began in the early '70s as the brainchild of writer/producer/effects designer Dan O'Bannon, who had previously worked with John Carpenter creating science fiction cult hit *Dark Star*. O'Bannon was hired to work on a film version of Frank Herbert's *Dune* in 1975 in France for Chilean film director Alejandro Jodorowsky. During pre-production, financing unexpectedly collapsed and O'Bannon found himself back in the 'States with no job and no future prospects. He moved in with fellow writer (and future *Total Recall* producer) Ronald Shusett. The two decided to team up on a writing project which was an off-shoot of an earlier story that O'Bannon had conceived concerning gremlin creatures who infiltrate a B-17 bomber during a raid over Japan. O'Bannon and Shusett decided to alter the setting to the more

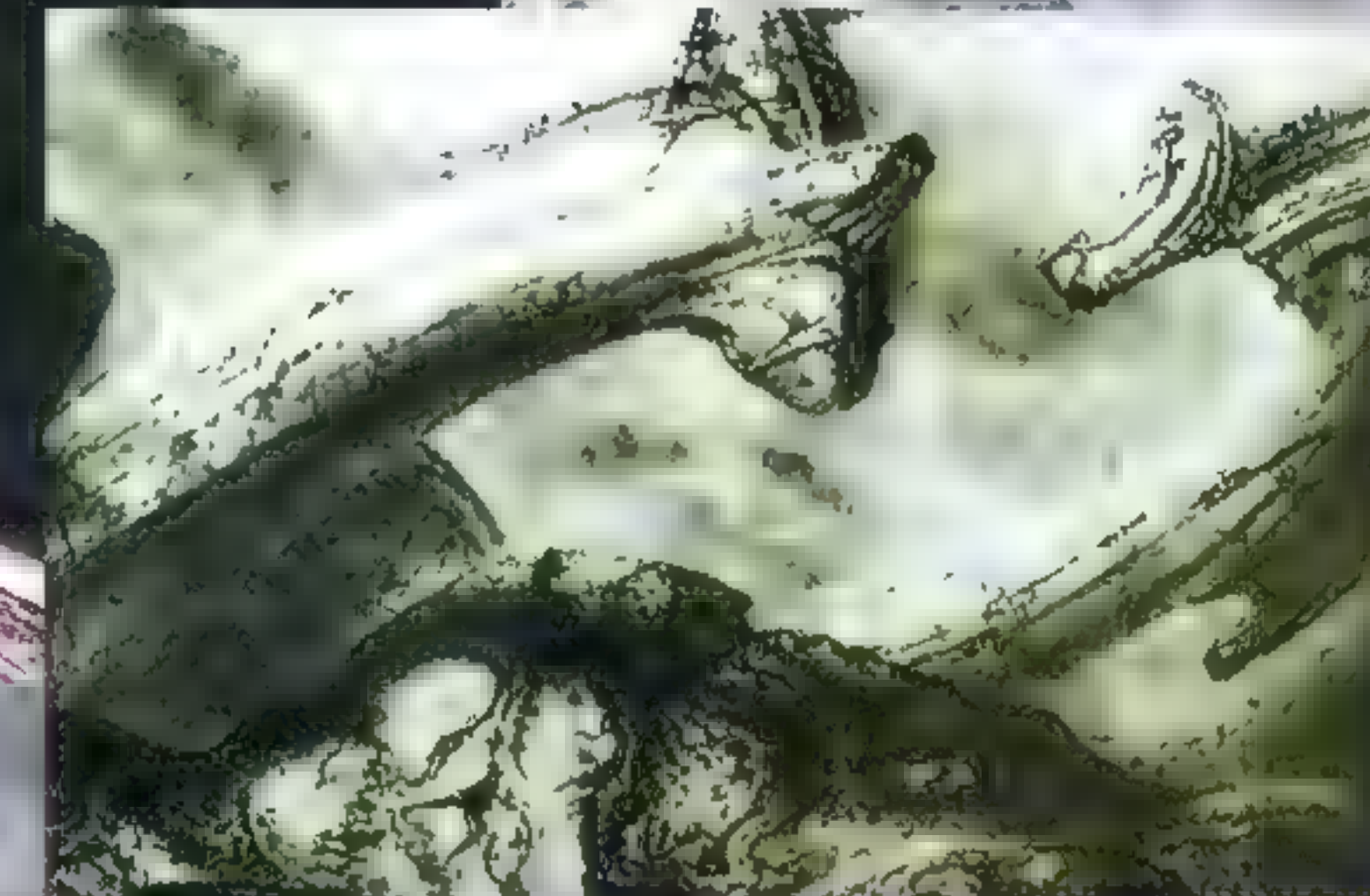


Left: *Nostromo* in flight—shot at Bray Studios, UK.

Right: Giger supervised his vision on set and airbrushed many of *Alien*'s props and costumes.

Below: Giger's airbrushed rendering of the 'derelict' ship.

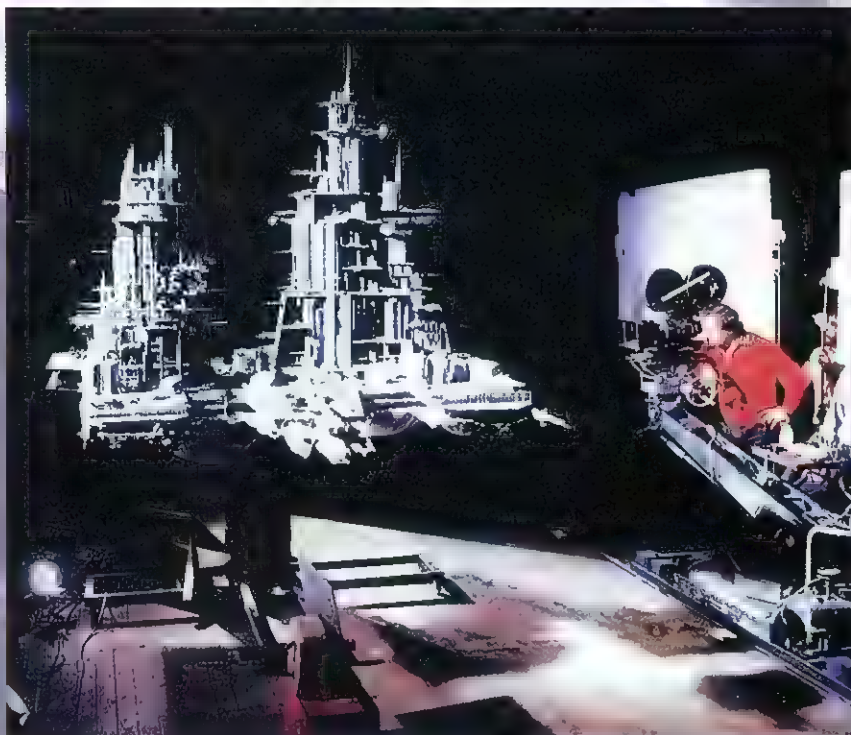
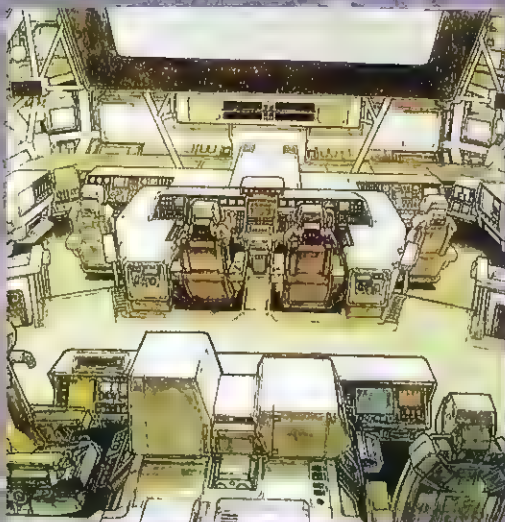
Bottom: the completed 'derelict' miniature and, inset: Ron Cobb's pre-production artwork version of the same.







Nostromo bridge (above) and cockpit design (below) by Ron Cobb. Right: Nostromo refinery miniature being filmed.



# the mother

## Creating the gothic high

paul taglianetti

**L**ooking back on *Alien* some twenty years after its original release, one can't help notice (excepting one quite famous dinner scene) how bloodless and tightly paced the film is. Compared to the current crop of celluloid thrillers, the movie is positively stoic. A brilliant fusion of gothic horror and high tech action, *Alien* remains one of the most popular films of the genre...

Released by 20th Century Fox in May, 1979, almost two years exactly after the release of *Star Wars*, *Alien* was greeted with mild indifference by the critics (*Time* reviewer Frank Rich cited the feature as 'depressing to watch' and 'an expensive movie that never soars beyond its cold desire to score the big bucks—it just shovels on the mayhem.') and respectable business at the box office. Backed by a cryptic and unusual ad campaign, *Alien* burst upon audiences that summer not unlike the film's titular Creature.

Yet, over two decades after its original release, it is as gripping and exciting as the day it was first released. Many directors, amongst them James Cameron, Paul Verhoeven and Larry and Andy Wachowski, owe a great deal of salutation to Ridley Scott's brilliant atmospheric sci-fi adventure. Like *King Kong* some 50 years earlier, many artists involved with the

film may lay claim to the title of father to the film's shape-shifting Creature, but there is little dispute that the driving creative force behind the project was director Ridley Scott. A graduate of the UK's *Royal College of Art*, Scott eventually became a well-known director of stylish TV commercials. In 1977 he directed *The Duellists* for producer David Putnam, which won the special Jury Prize at the Cannes film festival that year. Scott's directorial style had an acute visual flair that caught the attention of Gordon Carroll and his partners and Scott was brought on to oversee the picture. O'Bannon, while never a serious contender for the director spot, was given a position as visual consultant on the film. His input and suggestion of designs would have a great and lasting input on not only this film but also the others that followed.

*Alien* takes place almost exclusively aboard the gigantic mineral towing vessel *Nostromo*. While returning home from an ore gathering mission, the ship's on board computer intercepts a transmission emanating from a nearby planetoid. Ultimately the crew lands to investigate and inadvertently bring aboard a lethal *Alien* organism. One by one the crew fall prey to the lethal and elegant entity.

### The Writers

The genesis of *Alien* began in the early '70s as the brainchild of writer/producer/effects designer Dan O'Bannon, who had previously worked with John Carpenter creating science fiction cult hit *Dark Star*. O'Bannon was hired to work on a film version of Frank Herbert's *Dune* in 1975 in France for Chilean film director Alejandro Jodorowsky. During pre-production, financing unexpectedly collapsed and O'Bannon found himself back in the 'States with no job and no future prospects. He moved in with fellow writer (and future *Total Recall* producer) Ronald Shusett. The two decided to team up on a writing project which was an off-shoot of an earlier story that O'Bannon had conceived concerning gremlin creatures who infiltrate a B-17 bomber during a raid over Japan. O'Bannon and Shusett decided to alter the setting to the more



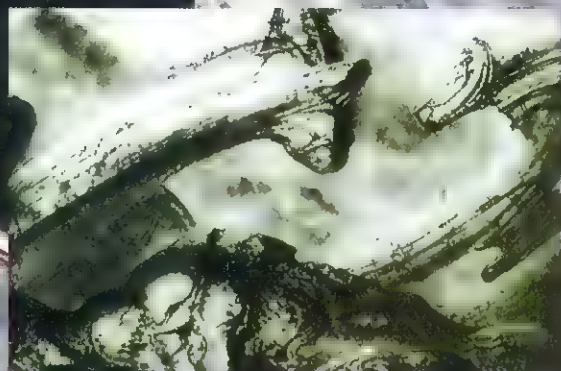


Left: *Nostromo* in flight—shot at Bray Studios, UK.

Right: Giger supervised his vision on set and airbrushed many of *Alien*'s props and costumes.

Below: Giger's airbrushed rendering of the 'derelict' ship.

Bottom: the completed 'derelict' miniature and, inset: Ron Cobb's pre-production artwork version of the same.

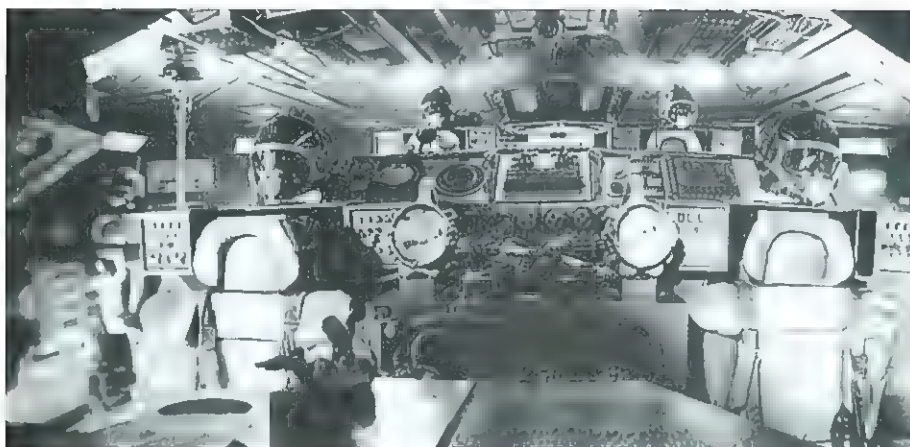


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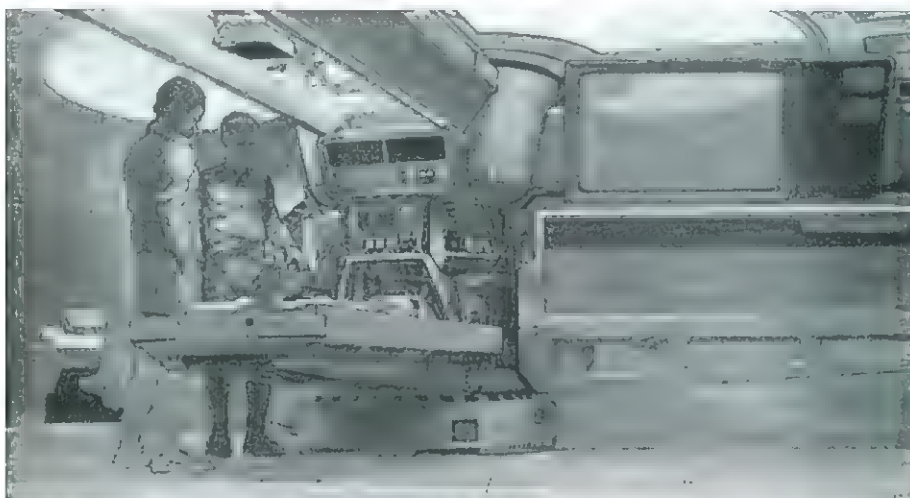
## h tech horror of *Alien*



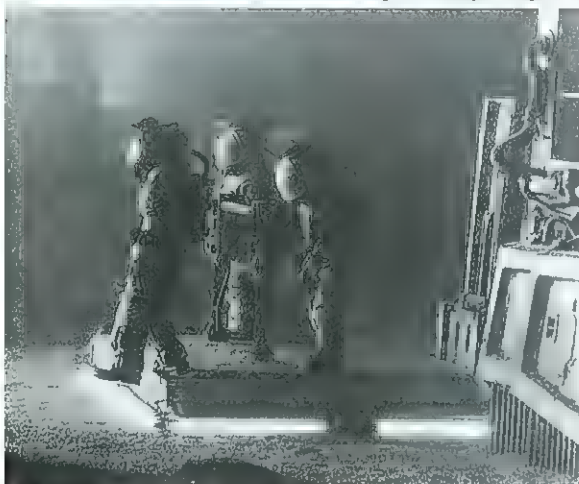




Nostromo cockpit set and (below) Ron Cobb's med-lab concept art.



Below. EVA suits from Moebius samurai-inspired designs. Right: Ron Cobb face-hugger design



Below. live action section of 'derelict' ship.



futuristic trappings of modern science fiction. In the wake of the success of *Star Wars*, this seemed like a logical choice. Originally titled *Star Beast*, O'Bannon's final script was eventually optioned by director Walter Hill, best known for his work on *The Warriors* and *The Driver*. He and his partners, screenwriter David Giler and producer Gordon Carroll, liked the general tone of the story but felt the script needed a bit of work.

Ultimately several scenes and scenarios were excised from the O'Bannon script. Notable was the ship's name-change from *Snark* to *Nostromo*. Also eliminated was the pyramid-like structure found by the crew where they first discover the *Alien* egg-pods. It was decided by the producers to condense the script. They would eliminate the sequence and, instead, put the egg chamber in the second tier of the derelict ship.

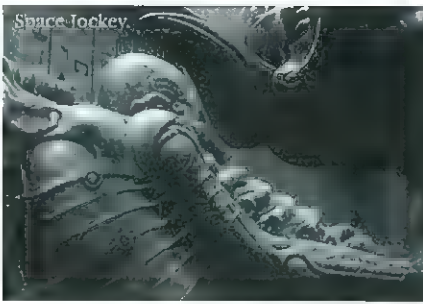
Hill and Giler worked on several re-writes during the six-month period they had the option on the script. They began to flesh out characters and streamline dialogue. The new script was presented to Fox with Walter Hill set to direct. O'Bannon was given a supplementary job as visual consultant on the movie. It was his first input that would ultimately shape the eventual look of the film. Eventually Hill opted out of directing the film but was still very interested in producing it with his other *Brandywine* partners. The producers then approached Ridley Scott to direct and pre-production began in earnest. The first directive would be to find and assemble a top-notch design team that could visualise the unusual hardware and lifeforms which would populate the movie.

### The Designers

Amongst the first designers brought on to the film were noted British sci-fi artist Chris Foss and designer/cartoonist Ron Cobb (who had most recently designed some of *Star Wars*' more striking *Cantina* creatures including *Hammerhead*). O'Bannon had met both artists in France while working on the *Dune* project and he was fairly confident they were up to the task of visualizing *Alien*'s high tech look. To alleviate the strain on the budget, Scott elected to storyboard the film himself. An experienced artist and designer, Scott's boards were fundamental in planning the film's elaborate action sequences.

O'Bannon's other significant contribution was suggesting to the producers that Swiss surrealist painter HR Giger design the *Alien*. Giger had spent many months painting conceptual drawings of *sandworms* and some of the architecture for the various planets on the *Dune* project when financing fell through. O'Bannon had seen a collection of Giger's work in the book *Necronomicon*. He eventually brought the book to Ridley Scott's attention to enforce the suggestion that Giger be the one to design the Creature. Scott took one look at the Giger airbrush painting *Necronom IV* and was hooked.





"That's it," he exclaimed and immediately insisted Giger be hired to modify his painting for the film's titular Creature.

One of Scott's own heroes, Jean 'Moebius' Girard, was brought on to create and design costumes and hardware. His most significant and visible contribution was designing the unusual atmosphere suits that closely resemble Japanese samurai armor.

For his production design team, Scott chose Michael Seymour, who had art directed the Vincent Price thriller *Theatre of Blood* and many commercials for Scott himself. Seymour's art department team included Oscar winners Roger Christian and Leslie Dilley who were put in charge of building the various and intricate decks of the *Nostromo* interior as well as the bizarre planetoid the ship lands on. To get the claustrophobic/military look of the interior of the *Nostromo*, Scott screened *Dr Strangelove* for the art team, pointing specially to the B-52 bomber sequences. His desire was to replicate the cramped feel of a military aircraft. Christian and his team spent weeks transforming the set using lengths of pipes and wires and other found miscellaneous bits of hardware. The interiors were painted mostly in whites and olive drab green to emphasize the military look Scott wanted.

### Effects supervisors

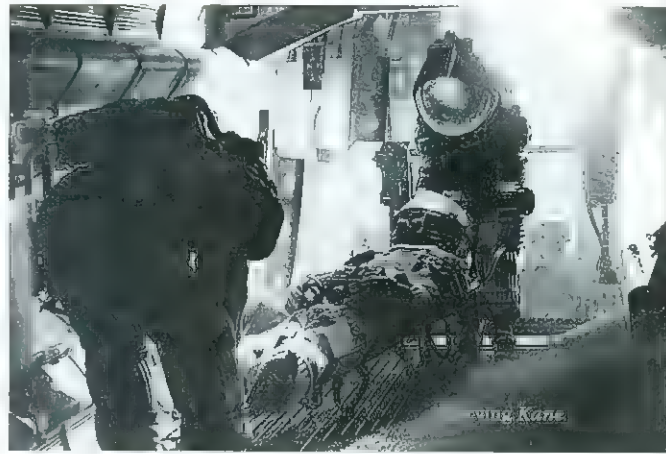
Several candidates were considered for the

role of visual effects supervisor. The producers first considered Doug Trumbull and John Dykstra, both well known in the field for their work on *Close Encounters* and *Star Wars* respectively. Unfortunately both were busy creating the effects for *Star Trek: the Motion Picture* and were not available. Since the film was being shot exclusively in England at *Shepperton studios*, it was decided someone local would be a better choice. The producers chose Brian Johnson, who was an experienced miniature photographer and designer. Johnson spent several years working for Gerry Anderson and Derek Meddings and was well known as the supervisor and designer of *Space 1999's* *Eagle* transporters. For the physical effects unit, Nick Alder, an expert at mechanical effects, was chosen. Alder was just finishing up work on *The Revenge of the Pink Panther* when he received the offer. In addition to the on set *Alien* effects, Alder would also design and execute the creation of the flame thrower weapons, the cattle prod wands and the atmosphere suits' carbon/methane exhausts.

### Face-Hugger and Chest-burster

It was established by O'Bannon and then, later, in Hill's draft, that the Creature would have a unique life cycle. The *Alien's* evolution begins as an egg. From the egg emerges a crab-like parasite (later dubbed the *face-hugger*). Upon attaching itself to the host organism, it lays an embryo in the host stomach. There it gestates until it is ready to emerge, which it does with great force, as a small, undeveloped version of the Creature (dubbed the *chest-burster*). From there the Creature begins to shed its skin as it assumes the general size and shape of the host organism.

To realize the small creature designs the producers commissioned Roger Dicken, an academy award nominee for his effects work on *When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth*. Amongst the most challenging of these was the *chest-burster* phase of the *Alien*. Although only on screen for a few seconds, its appearance would make a lasting impression on viewers everywhere. Dicken began working from a painting by Giger reminiscent in style of Francis Bacon. Dicken attempted to recreate Giger's *chest-burster* design in three dimensions but, after several failed attempts to get a believable movement, he was forced to abandon a literal interpretation of Giger's art and start from scratch. Working with O'Bannon and Scott's input Dicken created a new sculpted version. After some minor modifications (including the removal of two arms) a final version was picked and cast. Ultimately, the final design of the *chest-burster* would be handed over to effects coordinator Nick Alder who would be charged with executing the *burster* effect on set for the now infamous 'last supper'



scene. Alder created a device which would push up a hard plaster version of the *chest-burster* through a fake version of actor John Hurt's chest. The chest section was filled with fake organs then rigged with hoses to transport blood from the chest cavity. After the mechanics were put in place, the fake chest cavity was dressed in John Hurt's T-shirt. Hurt was placed under the table with his head protruding next to the fake cavity. Underneath the table, Dicken operated the *chest-burster* mechanism. Unfortunately the T-shirt proved troublesome as it had to realistically break away on cue. Alder and Johnson developed a chemical mixture that would dissolve the shirt fabric on contact.

Three *Panavision* cameras were set up to film the shot, which is fairly typical for shooting miniatures, explosions and other mechanics that are difficult to re-set quickly. At first the *burster* head was unable to penetrate the T-shirt. The acid solution did not effectively dissolve the shirt so the *burster* could emerge. The shirt was then carefully scored so the fabric would break more easily on subsequent takes.

The *face-hugger* was created almost directly from Giger's painting. A viscous, crab-like creature which springs forth from the *Alien* pods within the derelict ship, the *face-hugger* has a shockingly familiar appearance to actual lifeforms. Dicken sculpted the parasite from

Alien chest-burster



Ron Cobb art for Capt. Dallas' costume.





plasticine then reinforced it with a fiberglass interior. The fingers were basically aluminum armatures, which were covered with latex. For a scene where the now dead *face-hugger* is examined by *Ash* (Ian Holm), Scott and his effects crew used bits of raw oysters and shellfish to simulate the organs of the Creature. The tail was rigged with a thin wire, which was tugged off camera for the shot where the *hugger* tightens its grip on *Kane's* face. *Dallas* (Tom Skerrit) and *Ash* attempt to remove the parasite from *Kane's* face with a laser scalpel. Roger Dicken created a hollow leg replacement which could be injected with the chemical acid mixture created by Johnson and his crew through a small tube. This chemical combination was made with a mixture of acetone and chloroform with other chemicals added in. When dispensed the mixture could easily melt through the styrofoam mock-up of the *Nostromo* med-lab floor.

Charged with building the *Alien* articulated head effect was *Oscar* winner Carlo Rambaldi.



An Italian effects expert who had worked for director Mario Bava, Rambaldi was brought to the States in 1975 by Mega-producer Dino DeLaurentis to create the mechanical effects on *King Kong* (for which he received the first of three *Oscars*). Rambaldi would eventually construct three lightweight *Alien* heads with the articulated second teeth set. Two were fully articulated and the third was a lighter version for action scenes when the actor would be in the suit. For the section of mouth with the skin that retracts when the mouth is about to spring forward, Rambaldi constructed a membrane out of a clear rubber and used stretched condoms to simulate additional membranes within the mouth. After all the details were complete, Rambaldi added chrome teeth and the finished heads were turned over to Giger for airbrush detailing.

### Space Jockey and Derelict

Giger would also have a hand in sculpting and supervising the creation of his images. Chief among his many tasks was supervising the building of the *Alien Space Jockey*, the long dead inhabitant of the derelict craft where the distress signal emanates from. The *Jockey's* design was tackled by Foss and Cobb but ultimately Giger's concept was used in keeping with the look of the *Alien* itself. Giger worked with sculptor Peter Voysey to construct the mammoth shell of the *Jockey* and its chair. They built a wood frame layered with plaster. Tubing and other items were used to detail the structure. Liquid latex was then spread over the outer shell to accent the decayed state of the creature, which was then mounted on a circular platform in the center of the derelict set. Built by production designer Michael Seymour and his crew, this enabled the camera crew to shoot the *Jockey* at different angles, even though only a section of the interior was built.

The derelict was sculpted as a four foot miniature by the late Peter Voysey from Giger's sketches. The concept came from a

painting from *Necronomicon* which caught Scott's fancy. Slight alterations made it more 'crescent shaped'. Giger painted several angles of the ship and a clay and fiberglass sculpture was created. After exiting the *Nostromo* the landing crew finds itself in a ion storm simulated with large pieces of vermiculite blown through the air. The shards proved painful to film crew members who did not have the benefit of spacesuits.

### The Egg chamber

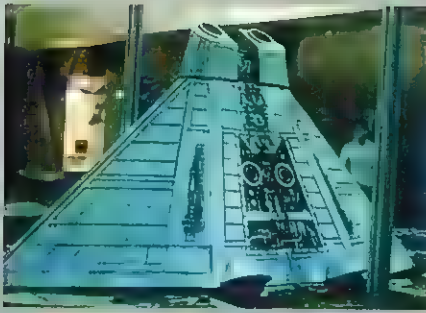
The original design for the deadly *Alien* eggs differed slightly from Giger's original concept. The initial painting had the egg opening as a 'vagina-like' slit. Eventually this would be altered due to its explicit nature and sculpted by Giger to open at the top with four separate folds. The hero egg was then turned over to effects supervisor Nick Alder and rigged with a hydraulically controlled mechanism to open on cue. The egg chamber was taken directly from a design concept painted by Giger. Since the wall sections were nearly identical in each section, multiple patterns of the chamber sections were cast in plaster and locked together. Over 100 sectional pieces were created to complete the derelict interior. A blue-light scanning laser was secured at the rear of the set and beamed across the base of the chamber. Smoke was introduced into the set, creating the blue mist layer.

For the initial attack of the *hugger* emerging from the egg, Nick Alder and crew rigged the interior of the egg with a small explosive charge and wrapped it in several yards of pig's intestines which uncoiled on cue with the charge. Later, several insert shots would be edited in of the *face-hugger* emerging and intercut with the intestine footage, creating a quick, violent introduction to the parasite. The egg lining was dressed with fresh cow's stomach lining which gave it an organic appearance. A hydraulic mechanism opened the egg on cue.

### The Alien

6ft 10 inch tall art student Bolaji Bodejo was hired to don the *Alien* suit for scenes where the Creature was shot full frame and no special mouth articulation needed. Giger designed, sculpted and airbrushed the suit himself. A full body cast was made of the student. From the body mold, Giger sculpted his biomechanical details and airbrushed the surface. It would eventually appear as a three-dimensional version of one of his bizarre paintings. Bodejo would also have to be rigged with a harness for scenes where the Creature lunges down on *Brett*. The Creature, hanging from one of the ship's landing legs, descends upon the crew member, kills him, and carries him up into the ship's upper airlocks. The Creature's second jaw set extends and splits his skull open. The effects crew rigged the actor's hat with tubes which had a blood mixture pumped into it from off stage. Inserts of Rambaldi's cable articulated head were shot for the POV.





*Narcissus* shuttle miniature half; Ron Cobb *Narcissus* artwork; *Narcissus* escapes the *Nostromo*.

Stanton was also fitted into a special wire rig harness for the additional shot of the Creature carrying him up in the ducts.

Eventually the *Alien* manages to wipe out the entire crew of the *Nostromo* save *Warrant Officer Ripley* (Sigourney Weaver). *Ripley* manages to escape in the shuttlecraft *Narcissus* but, unfortunately, the Creature manages to stow away on board and attacks her. *Ripley* blows it out of the airlock and vaporises it with the ship's exhaust engines.

For the climatic destruction the *Alien* a full size mock-up of the *Narcissus* shuttlecraft was hung from the ceiling and the *Alien* actor hung from a wire support and released on cue to simulate the gravity thrust of the airlock blast.

### Filming the Nostromo

While the majority of principal photography was being shot at *Shepperton*, Johnson and his miniature crew set up shop at nearby *Bray studios* to film the many shots needed of the *Nostromo*. The design of the ship had gone through much iteration. Ron Cobb had come closest to capturing the final look. The large, spire-like refinery towers came late in the design phase and added to the main ship structure. It was also decided that the majority

of the *Nostromo* shots would be done in-camera to dispense with expensive, time consuming composites and eliminate the need to use expensive motion control equipment. Brian Johnson was put in charge of photographing the *Nostromo* in post-production at *Bray*. Johnson and his model crew created several versions to satisfy their scale requirements. The smallest was a mere foot long (1/800th scale). There would ultimately be three versions of *Nostromo* miniature, the 12" version used primarily for long shots; a four foot version for the exhaust burn shots and the seven-ton large scale for landing and planetoid shots. The majority of the miniatures would be shot quite simply with a camera moving on a dolly track shooting at a low frame per second camera rate. This allowed the camera operators to hold focus while staying extremely close to the miniatures without giving away the scale. During the model building phase, Ron Cobb's design drawings were used as reference for the visual effects model crew to work with. The models were constructed primarily of wood and plastic. For detailing the model builders used dozens of plastic model kits which would provide minute modular pieces for the outer hull.

### Title design

Among *Alien*'s other interesting design refinements were the opening titles. The producers contacted title and graphic designers Richard Greenberg, who created the startling slitscreen titles for *Superman: The Movie*. For the opening Scott wanted titles reminiscent of Egyptian hieroglyphics. Greenberg's minimalist title design originally for *Alien*'s mysterious teaser trailer was so successful Scott decided to utilise the type formation for the opening credit sequence as well as the movie posters.

### Aftermath

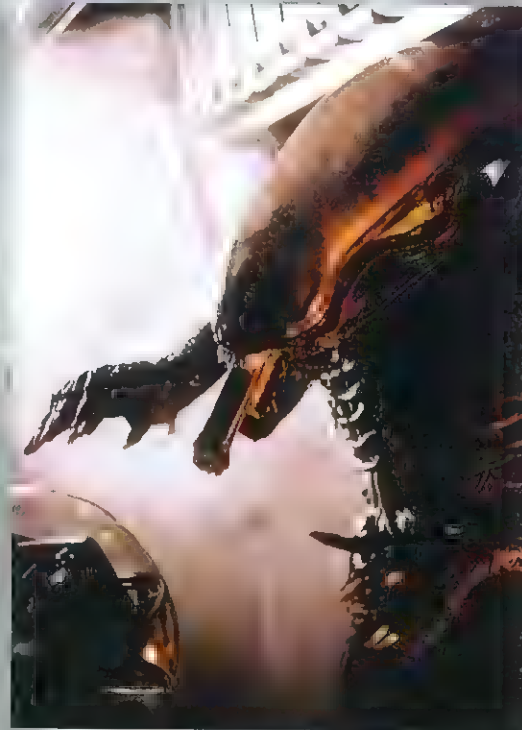
*Alien* was a tremendous hit that launched the careers of nearly all performers and technicians involved. O'Bannon continued his career as a successful screenwriter, sharing writing credits on such films as *Total Recall*, *Blue Thunder*, *Dead and Buried* and *Screamers*. He would ultimately realize his dream of directing in 1985 when he made the horror spoof *Return of The Living Dead*. Ridley Scott continues to be one of the most gifted visualists of modern Cinema. He followed *Alien* with the even more daring *Blade Runner* which has since become a modern classic of science fiction cinema. His new film *Gladiator* opens this summer.

Art Director Roger Christian would later go on to become a director himself. Last year he directed second unit on *Episode One/The Phantom Menace* and is currently directing the film adaptation of *Battlefield Earth*. Nick Allder continues to be one of England's most talented and busy effects experts. Most recently he contributed effects work for Luc

### Besson's the Fifth Element

The success of *Alien* brought new attention to the work of H R Giger and his designs were often copied in fantasy films that followed, among them *Galaxy of Terror*, *Scared to Death*, *Forbidden World*, and *Parasite*. His work has been collected in over two dozen books and he has gone on to create new designs for the films *Poltergeist II*, *Species*, *Future Kill* and *Killer Condom*.

For their work in creating the effects Johnson, Allder, Rambaldi, Giger and Ayling received the *Academy Award™* for best visual effects in 1980. The film was



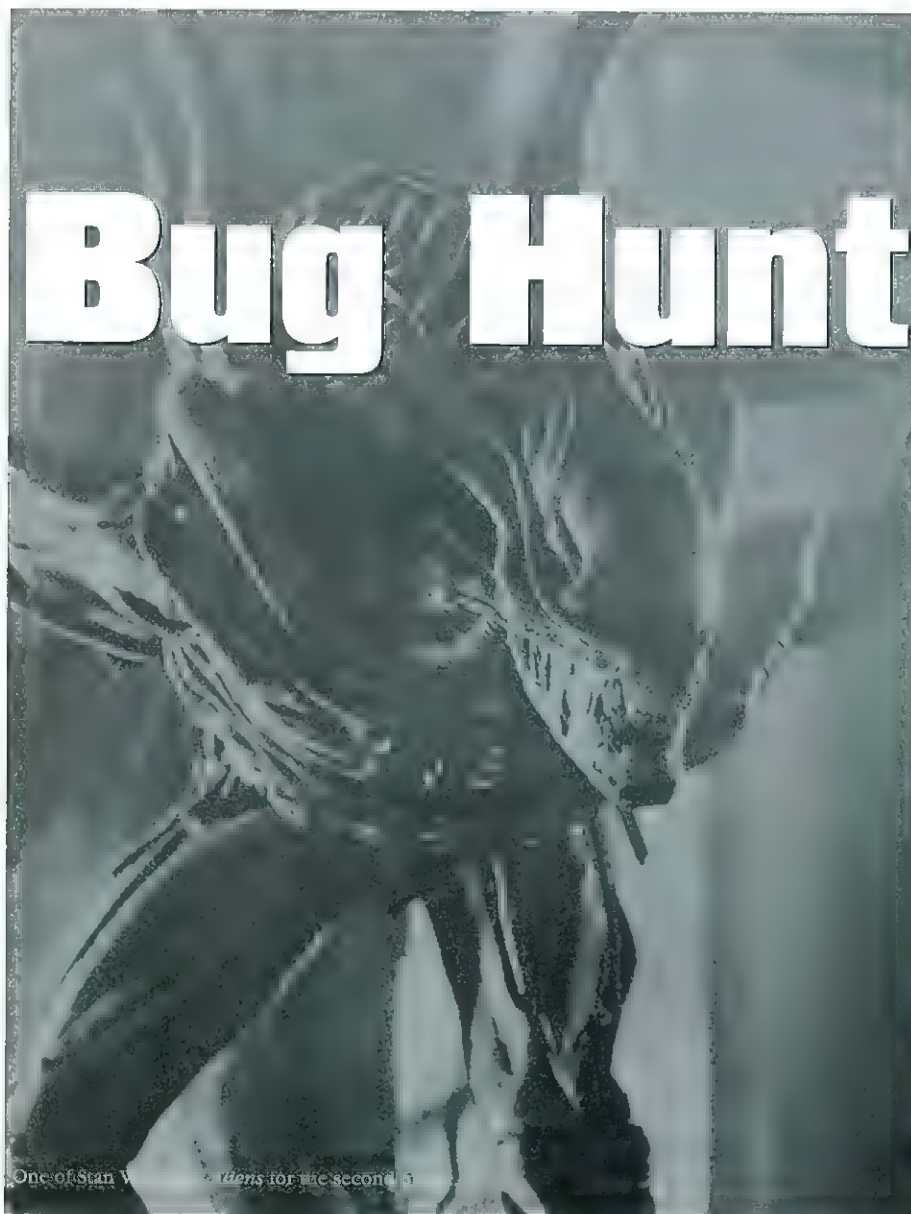
The *Alien* menaces *Ripley* at the film's climax.

also nominated for Art Direction, citing the work of Michael Seymour, Roger Christian and Les Dilley.

*Alien* has had a significant and lasting effect on the visual history of science fiction and horror films that have followed it. It has inspired three sequels and numerous imitators, but no equals. Although many critics and film historians analyzed it as nothing more than a glossy re-tread of '50s sci-fi horror themes, it has a uniqueness and freshness of its own and will remain a classic of the genre. A tough act to follow, as director James Cameron would soon discover...

*Special thanks to Bob Skotak and Brian Anthony for their help with the research of this article.*



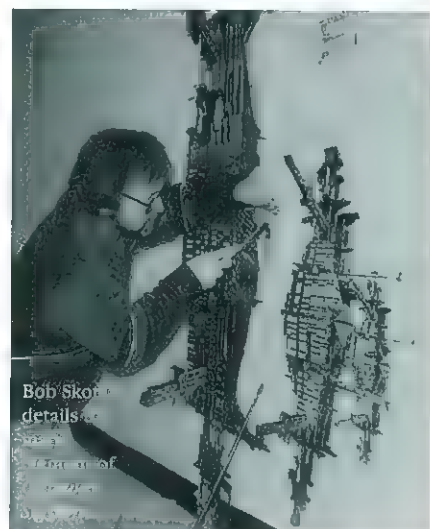


# Creating the visual effects for **Aliens**

paul taglianetti

**"We're on an express elevator to hell—going down!"**

**Hudson (Bill Paxton) from Aliens**



**F**ifty-seven years have passed for Chief Warrant Officer Ripley since first encountering the deadly species of acid spitting, HR Giger-designed killing machines from hell. But for her the memory has not faded. Nor had the memory faded for the filmmakers involved who were inspired to continue her story and that of those biomechanical monstrosities...

In the early '80s James Cameron had garnered a reputation as one of the top screenwriters of action thrillers. His **Terminator** script was a hot property and he was near completion on his draft for the **First Blood** sequel **Rambo**. It was while Cameron was writing that draft that Gordon Carroll, executive producer and co-owner of *Brandywine Productions*, which produced the first **Alien**, summoned him. Cameron met with Carroll and co-producers Walter Hill and David Giler with a view to reprising the adventures of *Ellen Ripley* and the evil Xenomorphs who had destroyed the *Nostromo* and its crew. Before Cameron could finish a completed script he

received the green light to direct his screenplay for **the Terminator**. This modestly budgeted sci-fi action piece became the surprise hit of 1984 and its success opened the door for Cameron to write and helm the long-awaited **Alien** sequel.

Cameron once again sat down and expanded the treatment to a full screenplay, fleshing out the characters and their motivations. In the continuation, *Ripley's* shuttle is found floating through space fifty-seven years after the events in the first film. She is haunted by what has taken place yet no one from the company believes her. She is stripped of her status as flight officer and is relegated to

working in the loading docks. Eventually she is approached to return to the planet where her crew first encountered the acid spewing creatures. Reluctantly she agrees and so begins the story anew...

## The Designers

The story and the character motivations were first and foremost on Cameron's mind. With a film of this kind, however, success also lies in the design and execution of the visuals. Cameron once again teamed with up with his **Terminator** co-scripter/Producer Gale Ann Hurd (who was instrumental in getting **Terminator** financed and off the ground.) and together they began to assemble their technical crew.

First and foremost was the assembly of the design and effects teams. Two of the first designers brought on the project were Ron Cobb, a former newspaper cartoonist who went on to become one of Hollywood's top conceptual designers (his credits include **Star Wars**, **Alien** and production designer on **Conan**) and Syd



Mead, whose background is in industrial design and whose impressive credits include *Tron*, *Star Trek*, 2010, and, of course, *Blade Runner*.

Cobb was eventually assigned to design the colony complex and assorted vehicles. Mead tackled designing the *Sulaco*, the large military transport that carries the marines through space.

For their visual effects team, Cameron and Hurd needed a crew Cameron was familiar with, one he felt comfortable with and one he felt certain could tackle the enormous workload. Cameron once again decided to team up with former Corman colleagues Bob and Dennis Skotak, who he had worked closely with on *Battle Beyond the Stars* and *Galaxy of Terror*.

"At the time I was working for a company called *LA Effects*," recalls Bob Skotak. "Jim Cameron called and asked if we would be interested in doing *Aliens*. I said 'yes' but we were working for this other company at the time and I told him if you wanted us, you'd have to use *LA Effects* too. Well, Jim really wanted us. He didn't know anything about *LA Effects* but Jim likes to work with people he's familiar with so we were hired."

Cameron contacted the Skotaks to work on the project in May of 1984 and then began having meetings on the film effects just before Christmas. "He came down to the studio and saw we were still using the old tricks (in-camera composites, opticals, etc.) and he knew we needed every trick in the book to make this film happen. "Fox had read Jim's treatment and figured it was about a 30 million dollar movie," recalls Bob Skotak. "They were not about to give him 30 million dollars as he had not really established himself as a successful director at that point. They settled for a budget of around 15 million, which is not a lot of money, even back then. It was really a low budget feature, no doubt about it." For Bob and Dennis Skotak, teaming up with Cameron again brought back old memories. "We picked up where we left off on *Battle Beyond the Stars*, using the same techniques which we knew would be possible, look good and yet be affordable. We had continuous meetings from December 1984 up until March 1985 and it was in March when we got the final script. We knew the live action was going to England and Jim was pleased we were willing to work there."

### Aliens/Creature creation

Once again, keeping with their ethic of hiring colleagues from past successes, Cameron and Hurd contacted Stan



Bob Skotak examines *Aliens* queen hive miniature.

Winston to create the menagerie of creatures for the film. Several new challenges confronted the Winston crew on this film. First and foremost was the only new entity for the movie—the gargantuan *Alien Queen*, which Cameron himself designed. This would be a monumental task for Winston as he had never created an articulate creature this size for a film but the opportunity was too great for him to pass up. Also among the many challenges were the *face-huggers*—



*Aliens* Narcissus shuttle under construction.

who in this inception could leap and run. And, of course, the *Alien warriors* themselves. Winston immediately began testing various techniques for the full-scale *Alien Queen*, initially creating a scale version of Cameron's design made of garbage bags and operated by two separate puppeteers (The footage of this test can be found on the deluxe *Aliens* laser disc). As for the *Alien drones*, there would ultimately be six full suits created but, thanks to intercutting and editing, the filmmakers were able to convince the audience that there was an entire hive of the beasts.

Additional enhancements were added to the *face-hugger* creatures as this time out they had to move. Cameron had suggested to Winston a 'push toy' mechanic, which he had utilized in a more rudimentary form for *Piranha II*. The basic idea would be that the creature would be pulled off

screen by an operator. The wheel mechanism would rotate the leg articulation mechanism, simulating a forward locomotion. The mechanics of the special *face-hugger* and the *chest-burster* would be ultimately handled by Steven Norrington, who would later become a film director himself (*Death Machine* and *Blade* most notably).

One of the more noticeable changes to the *Alien drones* themselves was the removal of the smooth cover-dome on the heads of the *Aliens* revealing the ridged cranium underneath. This differentiated them from the creatures in the first film without making them look too different and confusing viewers and fans of the first incarnation.

### Jordan tractor sequence

Originally omitted from the film but appearing on the now legendary laser disc and the new DVD transfer is the *Jordan tractor* sequence. It illustrates at the beginning how the colony was infiltrated by the alien infestation and establishes the audience's emotional connection with *Newt*.

"One of the sequences that didn't make any sense to shoot in England was the *Jordan Tractor/Derelict ship* sequence."

Recalls Skotak. "That *Derelict ship* was the property of Bob Burns at the time and it was in the 'States, so we thought we'd shoot the process plates and still photos of the *Derelict* here that could be later used for the matte composites. That was done in May or June of 1985 right before we left for England. We had Jay Roth (who later went on to found *Electric Image*), Denny Skotak, Bob Burns and Allen Markowitz on the crew and

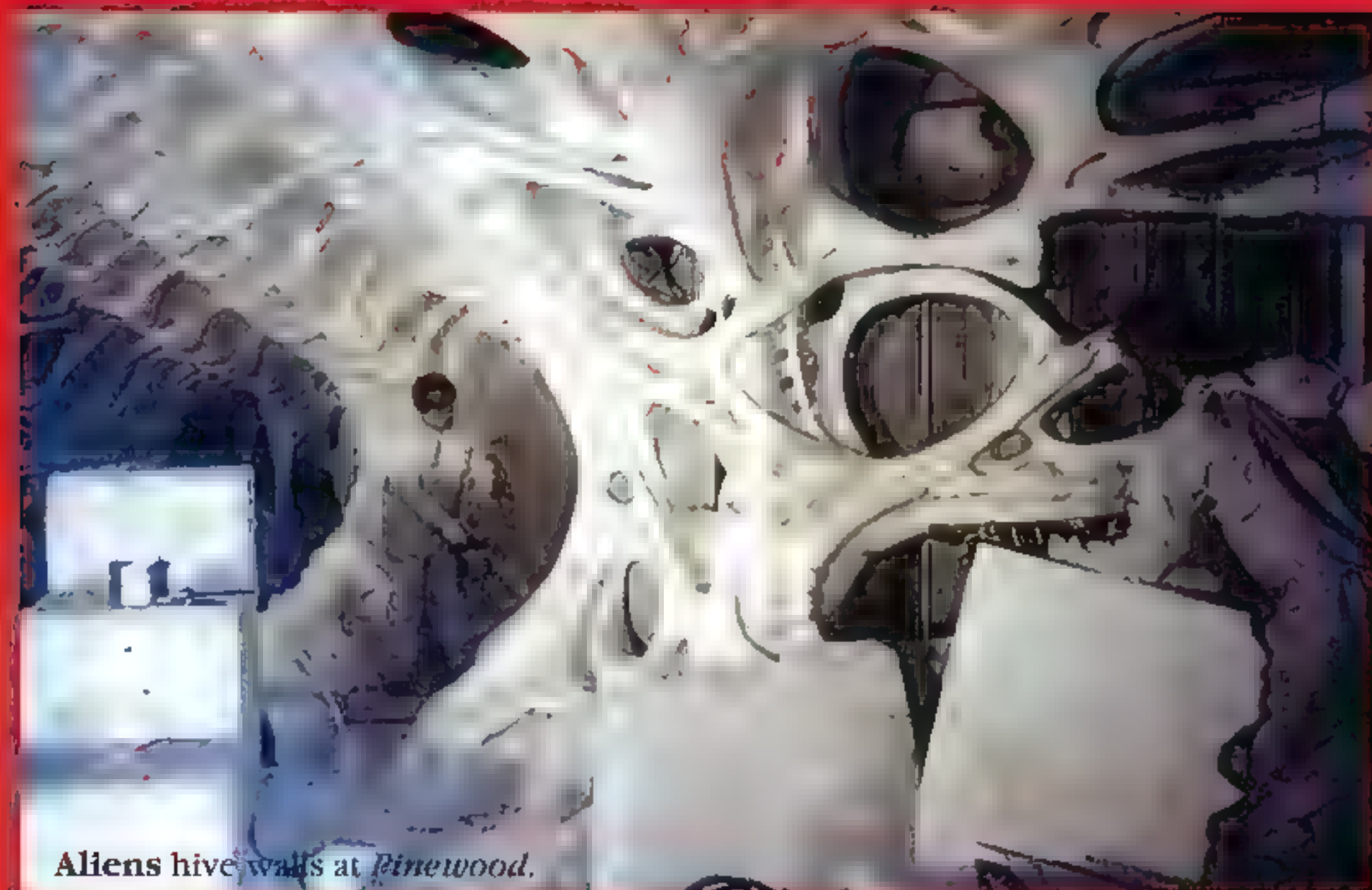
Judy Evans was our camera person and gaffer. When the photography and stills arrived in England, Skotak worked on creating a matte version of the exterior of the *Derelict* with matte painter Peter Melrose. This painting was combined in-camera with a beam splitter in front of a desktop version of the planet surface and the miniature *Jordan Tractor*.

"Jay Roth also worked as a model builder for me. He worked with me again on *T-2*, creating the nuclear explosion sequence. We had shot the process plates months before they were needed but we saved a lot of money and expense shooting them here. Also Jay built the *Narcissus* shuttle here as well."

### Narcissus shuttle/opening sequence

Skotak recalls the re-building of the lost shuttlecraft which carries *Ripley* and *Jones*





Aliens hive walls at Pinewood.



Study models of Queen and Loader.



Detailing process for miniature.



Setting up drop ship for filming.



Queen.



APC is fitted with minute detailing.



miniature is positioned.



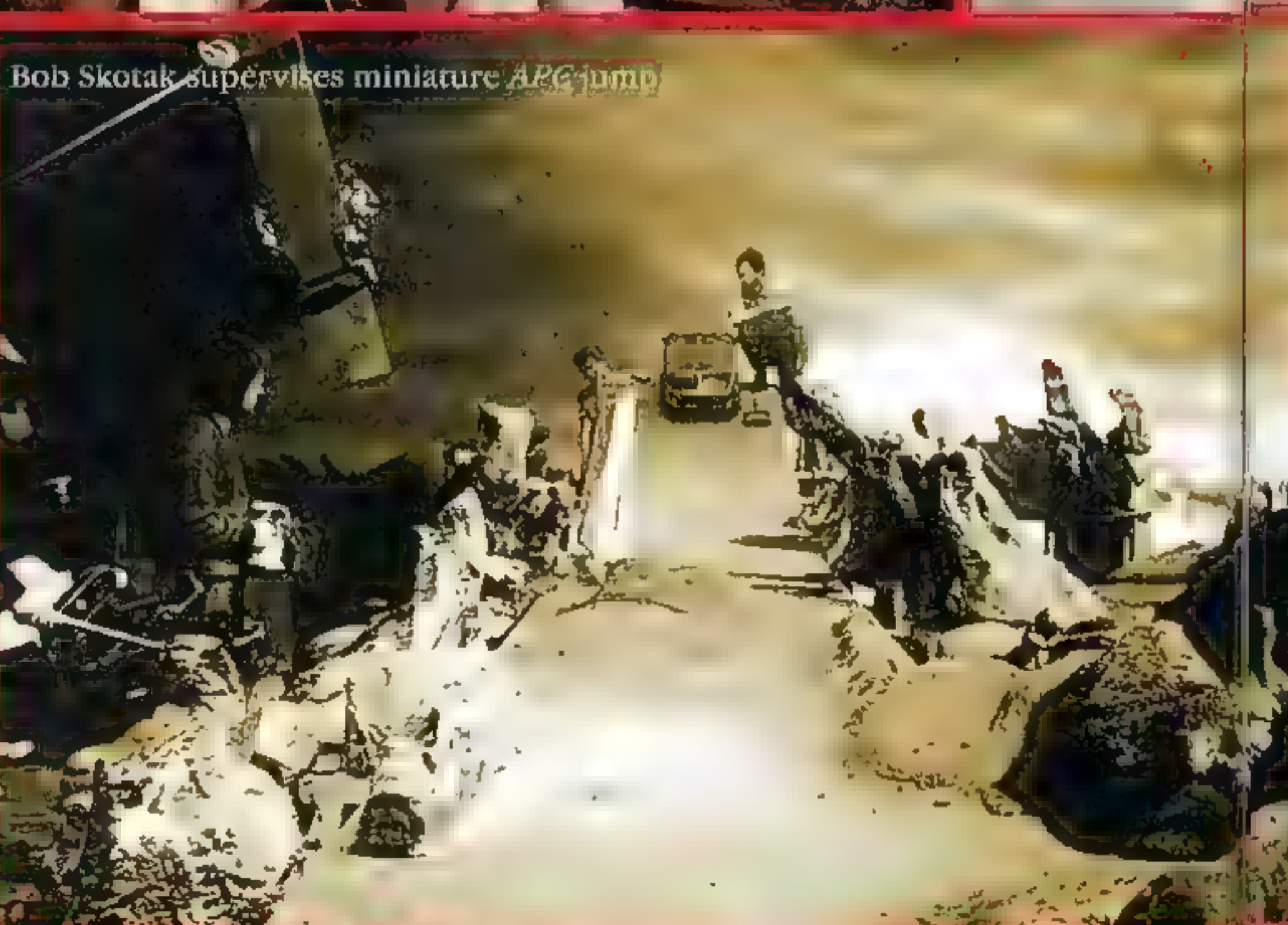
Drop Ship being shot above.



APC miniature.



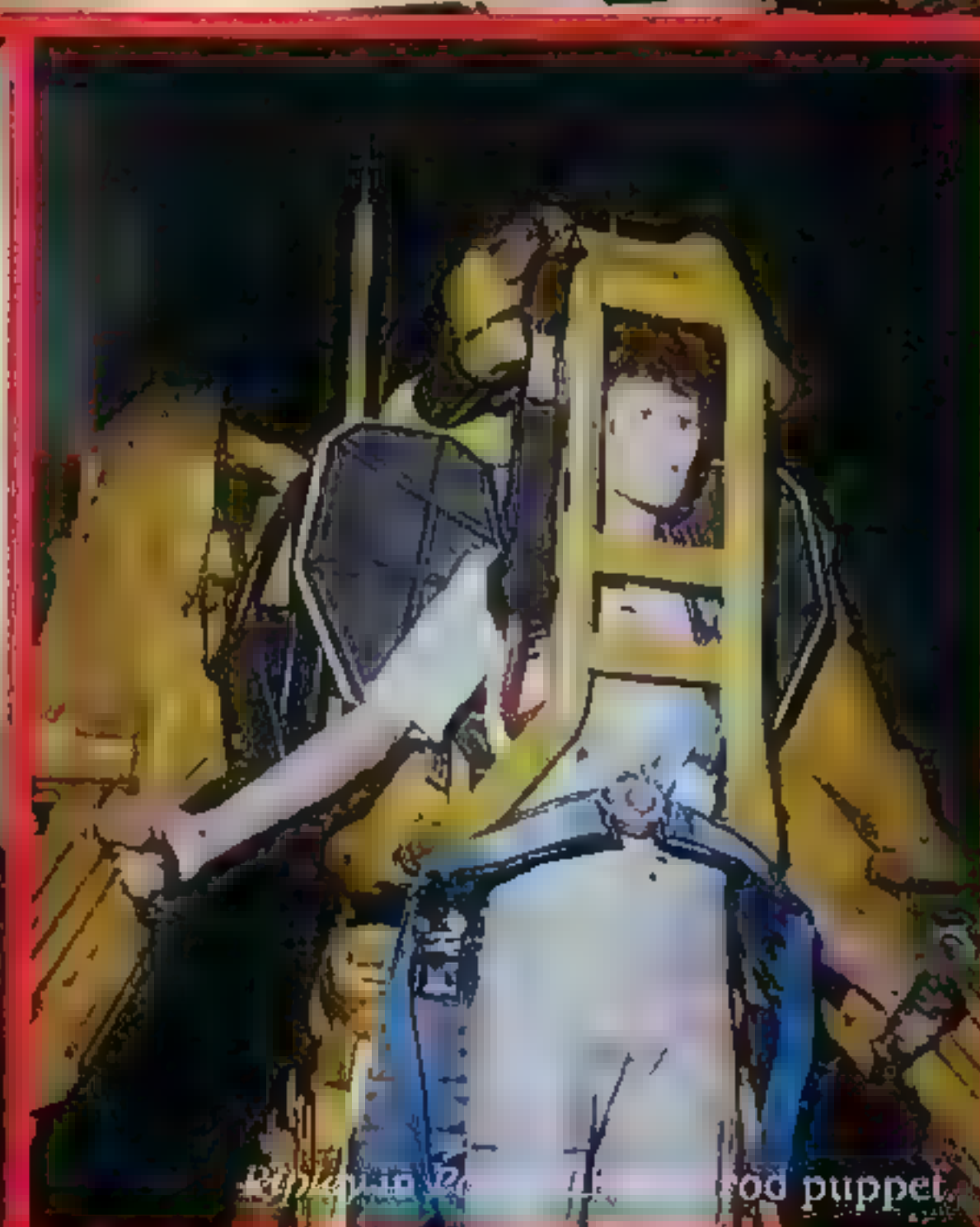
Elaine Edford, Bob and Dennis Skotak on Pinewood stage set.



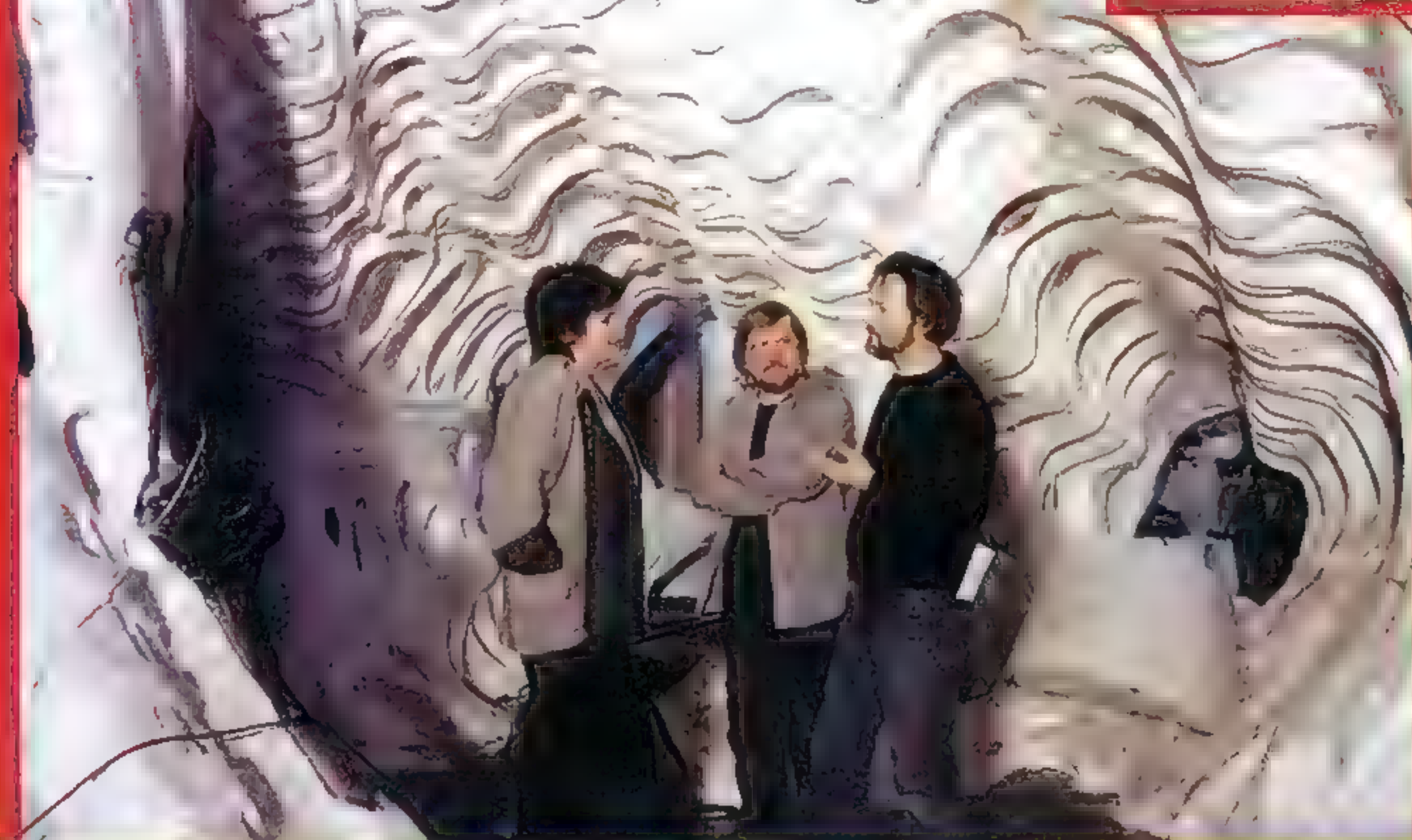
Bob Skotak supervises miniature APC jump.



Preparing Drop Ship landing sequence.



Riparian 2000 rod puppet.

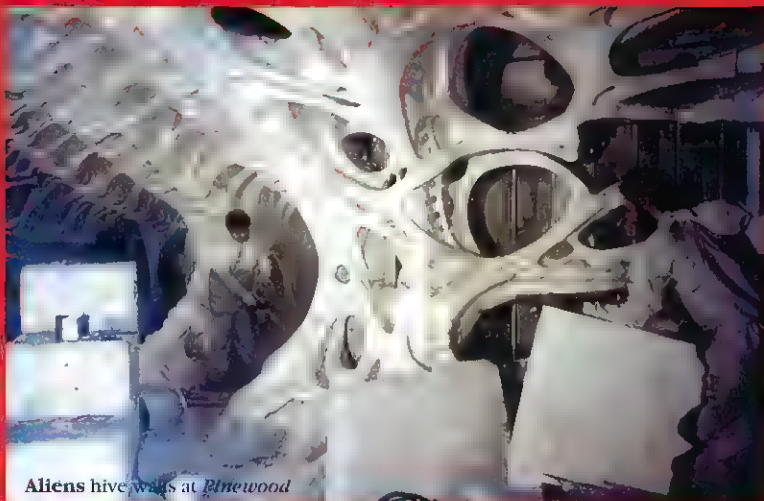


Process tower miniature under construction.



2nd complex miniature.





Aliens hive walls at *Pinewood*



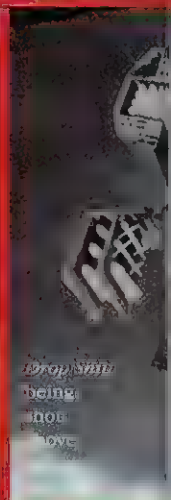
Study models of *Queen* and *Loader*.



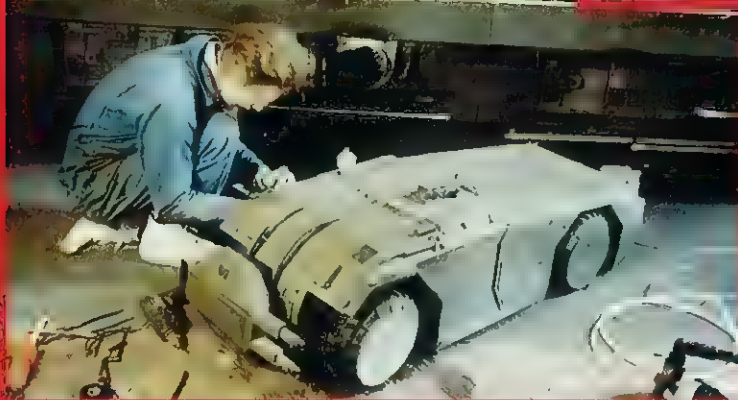
*Queen*  
*APC* is fitted with minute detailing.



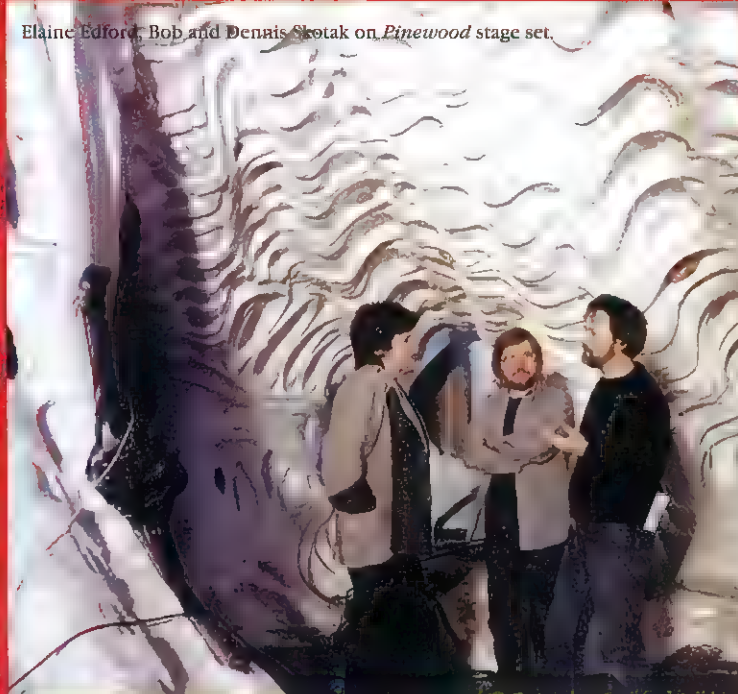
...is positioned.



Prop and being not love



Bob Skotak supervises miniature...



Elaine Edford, Bob and Dennis Skotak on *Pinewood* stage set.



Process tower miniature under construction.





Detailing process for miniature



Detailing process for miniature



Preparing Drop Ship area for filming



Preparing Drop Ship area for filming



Preparing Drop Ship area for filming





Bob Skotak with derelict

through space. "The original *Narcissus* was lost or stolen so we were forced to re-build it. We used still images. There weren't a lot of photos that actually existed. I had a few images of it from my own collection that I gave to Jay so he had reference. Those photos I took when the original model was on display at the museum of science and industry. And also we had some frame clips from the original film, which were squeezed."

Later Skotak designed a desk top section of the salvage ship which draws the shuttle craft into its undercarriage. Skotak designed the ship and handed over the building assignment to Fasil Karim who worked on the England model crew. Cameron originally wanted the salvage ship to be so large that only a portion of it would be seen. Although famed production designer Peter Lamont was designing the full size sets, Skotak was often given reign free reign to design some of the miniature pieces as with the salvage ship.

### Arriving in England

"When we got to England, recalls Skotak, "we were still working on sketches and models. I remember we jumped on [a] plane with very little sleep because we filmed the *Derelect* ship right down to the last minute. We just hit the ground running as soon as we got there. We had meetings right away with the model and art departments."

But the environment was new for the Skotak brothers, who had never worked in England. They were allowed to bring over their colleague Pat McClung (future VFX supervisor of *Dante's Peak* and *Armageddon*) as their crew chief. The rest of the crew would be comprised of British artists who would work out of *Pinewood studios*.

"Pat McClung was the de facto model supervisor. He had to oversee the flow of designs from Jim, Ron Cobb, Syd Mead et

al along with the constant requests for modifications to same from Jim or the Art Dept," notes Dennis Skotak. "It was a mind numbing swirl of factors that had to be kept careful track of due in large part to practical matters such as budget and the almost impossibly late arrival of the designs. Adding to the difficulty was the adjustment to a new way of operating in a foreign country. Suppliers that Pat was intimately familiar with in L.A. were not available, of course, in England but with considerate help from people like Mark Harris who was a very talented and resourceful set decorator in the live action Art Department Bob was overall more involved in the model/art direction along with Pat than myself (my duties primarily that of photographic supervisor) but the three of us attended countless meetings with Jim as well as all departments. Many a week night and weekend (with some at Jim's home) were spent together poring over the myriad issues (a lot of which were money related... this *was* a low budget movie after all). Pat contributed many problem solving ideas and, in many ways, we all got involved in each other's areas. We were all fighting the same

time/money."

The Skotaks would also be given a crew comprised of many of England's top craftsmen. "There were people recommended to us by John Richardson (*Aliens* special effects supervisor) who was a fixture there at *Pinewood*," notes Bob Skotak. "He had done all the *Bond* pictures right up till now. He knew a lot of these people and felt comfortable around them. Some of them were veterans of Gerry Anderson's *Thunderbirds* show so they had extensive miniature experience."

The Skotaks spent many hours conferring with Cameron over the desired look of the effects. "Our meetings with Jim Cameron were many," remembers Dennis Skotak. "We would often meet on Saturdays at the studio and in L.A. style we would go well past lunch time but in England at that time when it came time to finally go out to eat we ran into a peculiarly English custom... pub hours. In other words the restaurants, if they served alcohol, had to close during the same hours the pubs did (a leftover from WWII). This meant that at 3 in the afternoon Jim Cameron, Bob, Pat and myself would have a lovely lunch at *McDonalds*!"

### The Colony complex

"So we began building the miniatures. We had the huge colony complex to build. It was approximately 90 feet long as I remember.

"Ron Cobb created the main design of this initially and the full-scale complex was supervised by Peter Lamont and his set decorators Crispian Sallis and Mark Harris. Mark Harris also let a lot of salvaged pieces from various sources, which would be utilized with the miniature unit. Skotak himself also added several designs of his own to the colony structure. He also designed and built several of the colony's ground vehicles.

"I think that the most satisfying shot in the film technically is the hanging





miniature of the *Alien*'s 'encrustation' in the atmosphere processor that establishes the setting and extends the set far beyond what the budget would have allowed for. It works so well and it's all in camera! My personal favorite sequence is the exterior of the colony complex. I love stormy weather so much and so I love the mood of that piece. I'd really like to be there... except for those pesky creatures!"

### The Drop Ship/APC

The *Marine Drop Ship* (which no doubt derives its name from Heinlien's *Starship Troopers*) went through several design iterations before it reached its final form. Both Ron Cobb and Syd Mead took a crack at the design but, ultimately, it was Cameron himself who came up with the final design solution. According to Bob Skotak, Cameron wasn't satisfied with previous design attempts, yet he was not able to illustrate what he wanted himself. Eventually Cameron came into the art department one weekend and actually built a foam core and plastic miniature version which closely approximated what he was looking for. Cameron had based his designs loosely on the *Apache AH-64* assault chopper. One of the film's art department chiefs, Brendan Alimo, built the original six foot version which the others would ultimately be based on. Peter Astin, a freelance model builder, was contracted to build the fiberglass shells of the other versions which were brought to the model shop for detailing. There were approximately ten versions, according to Skotak, most of which were stunt versions. Only one was built specifically with mechanized landing gear and missile phalanx pods.

The crash version had to respond to a very specific action according to Skotak. "The craft would have to bounce, have its skid sheared off, and bank at a certain angle." Eventually the crash footage was used as a process plate for an in-camera composite with the 1st unit. In the scene the *Drop Ship* has been infiltrated by an *Alien warrior* in flight and the pilot is killed. As the ship spins out of control it crashes directly in the path of the surviving marines awaiting pick up.

For this the *Drop Ship* was rigged on double wires running parallel through the craft to support its weight. There was a third wire rigged to the hull to help pull it forward. For this set-up the Skotaks arranged three cameras all running at 120 fps. They would eventually shoot the stunt several times until they got it perfect. The *Drop Ship* exploding into the APC station would eventually be picked up later in the shooting schedule as it was not needed for process work. John Richardson was brought in to supervise the miniature pyrotechnics in addition to his many other



duties on the film.

"One of the biggest problems with the *Drop Ship* was that the landing gear was so frail it made it difficult to support. We had to shoot at high speed and one problem we had was hiding the wires, which we did using the fog and rain elements. [Denny and I] were really the directors of lighting and photography [of the miniatures] working in conjunction with the union cameraman. We were not allowed to operate the cameras so we had to work closely with the British crew. Our cameraman was Harry Oakes who had done a lot of the *Thunderbirds* and other Gerry Anderson shows and really knew what he was doing! He was really good at painting the wires and lighting to hide the wires. Motion control wasn't really an option because Jim didn't want a 'mechanical look' for the motion of the ship. So we had giant boom arms on giant movers and these things had to be swung around so fast. The ship would just flying across the room and it had to just suddenly slow down and land."

"The *Drop Ship* crash sequence was in most ways the most challenging problem we faced, partly due to the specific requirements of action that Jim had desired but also because of time restrictions that were imposed on us," notes Dennis Skotak. "There was a need for these scenes to be made into rear projection plates which meant, of course, that any delay on our end could jeopardize the live action photography. We were on a tight schedule as it was but when we needed to do several re shoots of the crash, it got a little scary."

There was one interesting sequence in the *Drop Ship* crash sequence which unfortunately never made it to the final cut according to Dennis Skotak: "The one piece of film I really miss not making it

into the finished film was a take looking over the shoulders of *Ripley* and *Newt* as they watched the remains of the *Drop Ship* burning in the atmosphere processor in the distance. The shot was a front projection plate but the smoke was added practically with a fogger blowing smoke in front of the screen. Because of the optical nature of this kind of screen it is very tricky to use smoke. The smallest amount can really obscure the projected image but by luck I found the exact right amount and it created a shot that Jim said gave him chills. Unfortunately the effect of the swirling black smoke was too short due to the need for incorporating a dissolve in the shot so an alternate, albeit not as dramatic, take was used in the end."



### Process projection work.

"We just cranked away at (the model work). We had so many process shots we had to do to save on expenses and creating expensive opticals. We were going to do a lot of process photography, both rear and front projection, and we needed the miniatures done right away.

*continued on page 44...*



# Aliens Convention '99 Retrospect

geoff topping



**S**unday, 10th October 1999, saw the Aliens Fan Club's second major gathering—Aliens Convention 99. The event was held in the UK, at the Shepperton Moat House hotel, less than five minutes drive from Shepperton Studios—appropriate, as it marked the 20th anniversary of the release of *Alien*.

My day began at 6.00am as I made my way to the hotel to assist friends Harry Harris, John Shadwell and Mike Rush of the *Harry Harris Aliens Collection & Archive* in the setting up of their exhibition of original props, costumes and miniatures. Here we also met with event organiser and *Aliens Fan Club* President Simon Clarke, who went through the day's itinerary with us.

As we continued to set up—an exhausting task—levels were being checked on the audio visual equipment which included a video projector, while a full size *Alien Warrior*, courtesy of Steven Bryant, was being positioned against a photographic background. Fans could have their picture taken with it by the *Archive's* resident photographer Geoff Lawrence throughout the day.

By 8.00am dealers were arriving and displaying their wares. Alas, I was too involved with the exhibits to venture forth and discover any early bargains. In one room an *Aliens* role-playing game was being prepared by Robert Edmunds and this would attract interested parties throughout the day.

SF&F was represented by Bob Gould and Tim Hooper. Poor Mike

and Dave were stuck in Lancashire chained to their computers, burning Mike's patented midnight oil. Working, nay *slaving*, dear reader, to bring you the finest in future issues.



Bob and Tim brought along some fine examples of kits and prop replicas they have built and reviewed for the magazine.



By the time the doors opened at 10.00am we had just finished setting up as attendees began to come in. The few minutes prior to the beginning of the con day allowed everyone to grab rarities and one-offs on the dealer stands or to catch up with old friends.

This was truly an international convention, with fans attending from all over the UK, Spain, Italy, Germany and Norway. I must give special mention to committed US fan Tom Kish, who made the long journey to Shepperton from Connecticut, and proved to be a very nice chap. However, Tom did not make the longest journey—one truly dedicated fan flew over all the way from Mauritius!

At 10.45am Simon Clarke made the opening address, welcoming everyone and explaining that, unlike other conventions, all extra monies made through the con would be going to this year's chosen charity, the *Imperial Cancer Research Fund*. Convention guests would also be kind enough to sign autographs for fans, with all proceeds going to the charity.

Suddenly Simon was interrupted as an *Alien warrior* sped down the aisle, followed by a heavily armed group of *Colonial Marines* led by *Aliens*:







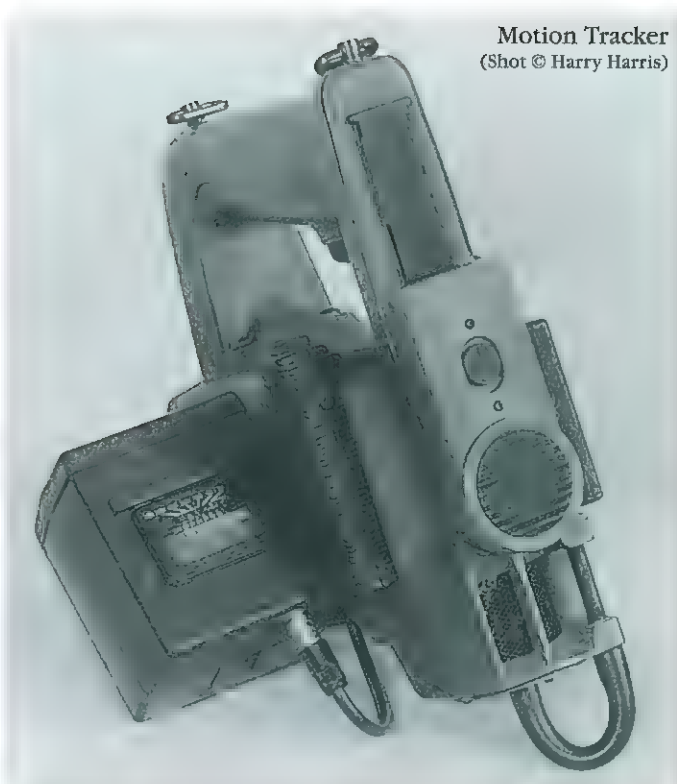
Opposite top left: Harry Harris speaking at Shepperton's Moat House; top right: Collette Hiller as *drop ship* pilot *Ferro* inside the full scale *drop ship* cockpit set (© 20th Century Fox Film Corporation); centre a small section of props on display at the con.

This page top: *Aliens* fan club president Simon Clarke and friend. (Photo: Geoff Lawrence); One of the *Alien Warrior* performers on the Atmosphere Processor set. Note the effects technician wielding a brush and bucket of slime. (© 20th Century Fox Film Corporation); *Alien* collector John Shadwell; Filming for TV reporters outside the convention. Note the *Alien* with head removed. (Photo: Harry Harris); Costumes on display. (Photo: Geoff Lawrence). *Hudson* with Flamethrower (© 20th Century Fox Film Corporation.).

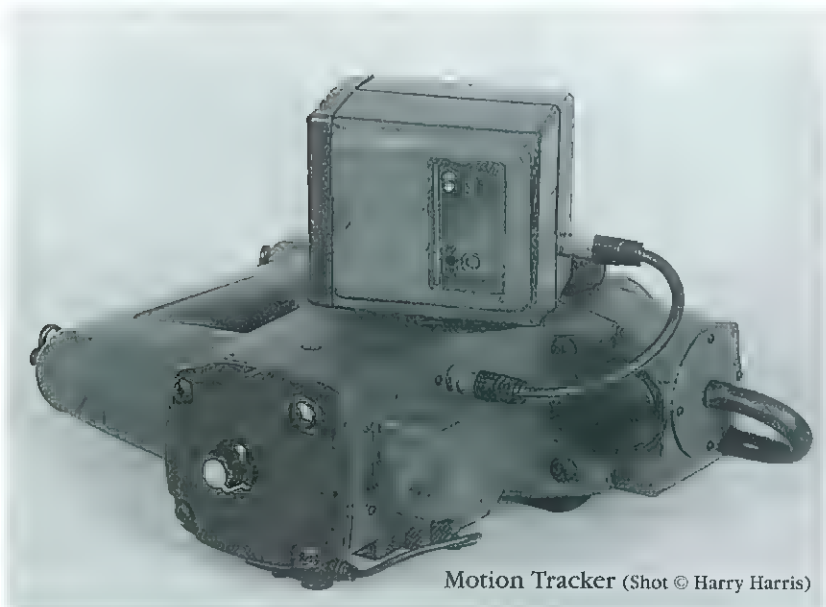




Motion Tracker (Shot © Harry Harris)

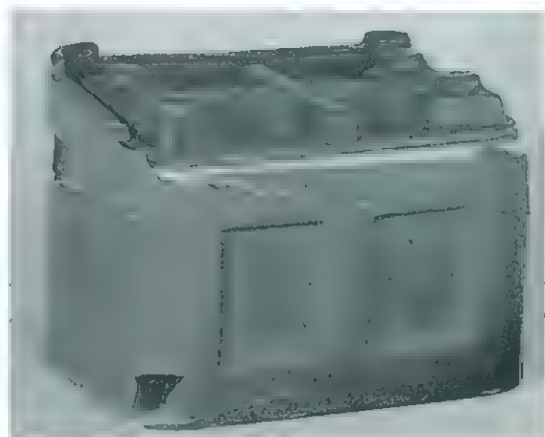
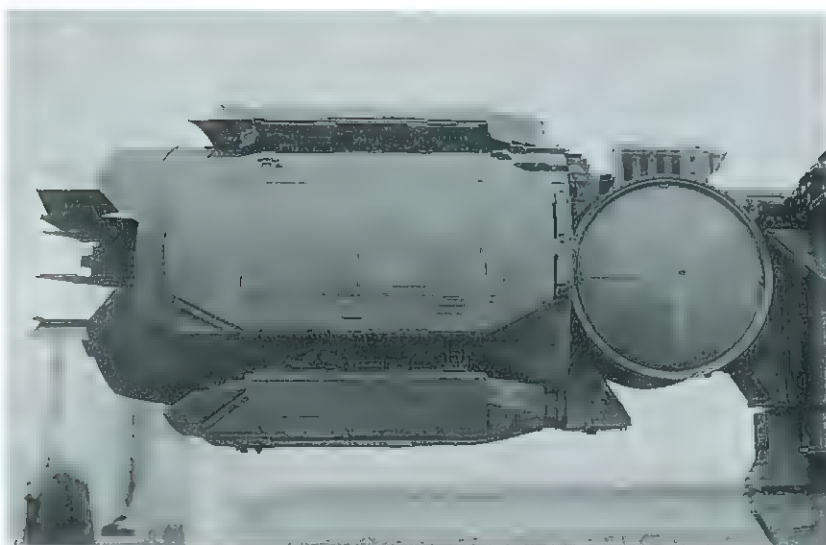
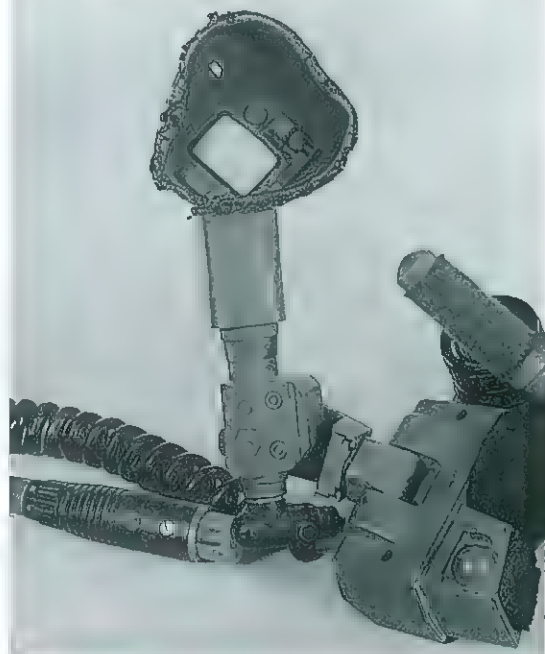


Motion Tracker  
(Shot © Harry Harris)

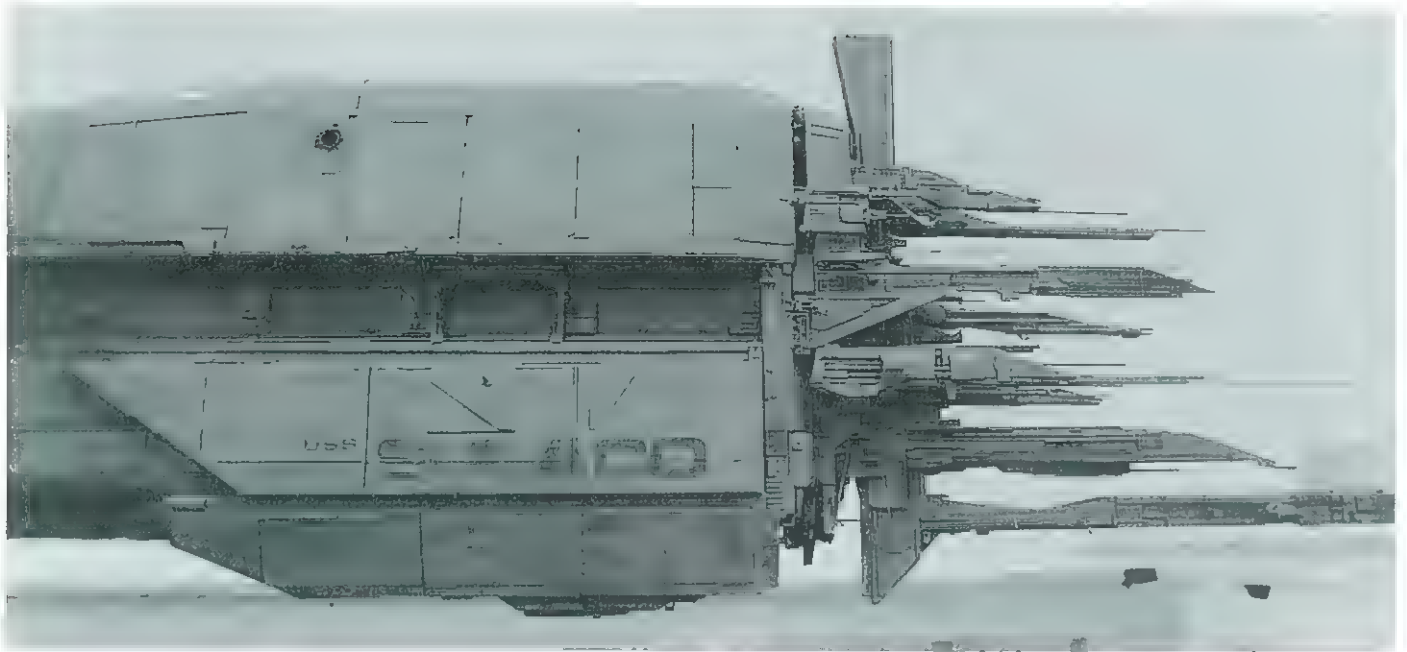


Motion Tracker (Shot © Harry Harris)

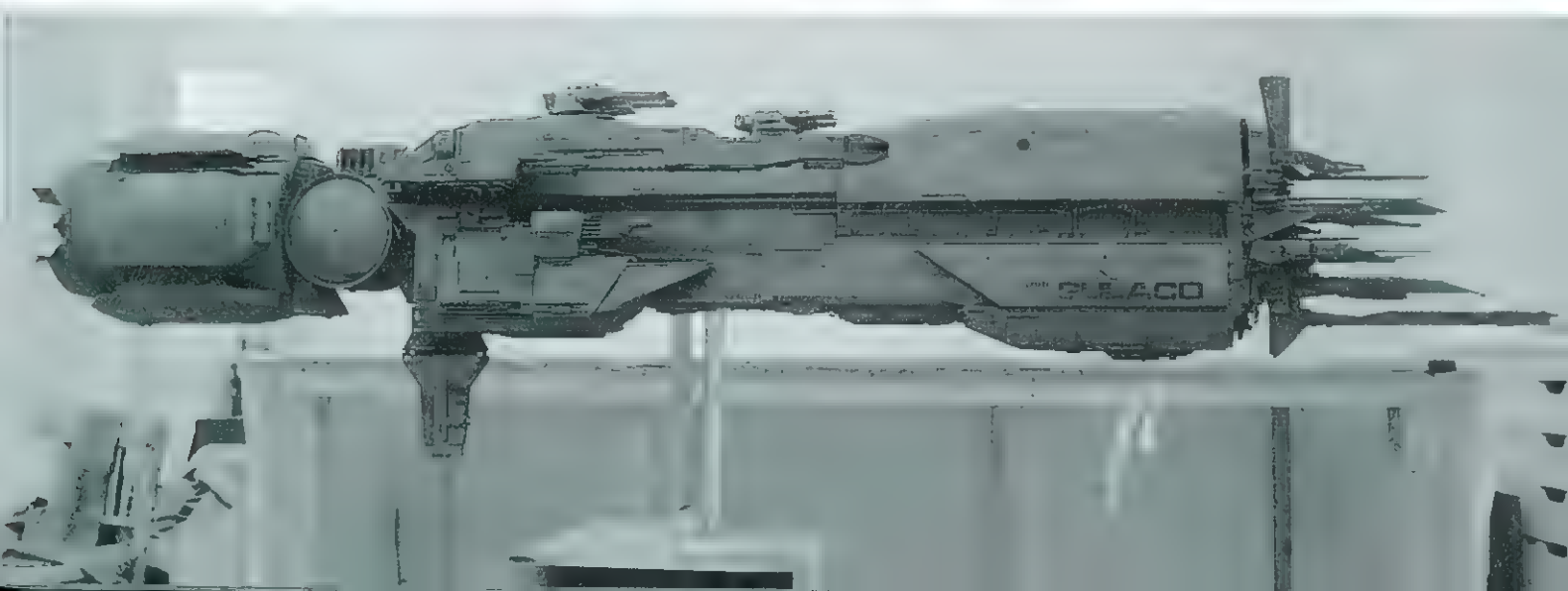
Drake smart gun eye piece/headset.  
(Shot © Harry Harris)







Opposite bottom right: miniature cargo crate featured in the *Queen Alien* vs. the *Power Loader* sequence (Shot © Harry Harris).  
This page and opposite bottom left: Sulaco miniature (© Twentieth Century Fox).







Aliens pulse rifle



Aliens flame thrower.

Bugstomper logo on back of Aliens crew jacket. (screaming eagle is wearing Reeboks). Reebok manufactured Ripley and Bishop's boots as well as providing the crew jackets.



Aliens smart gun.

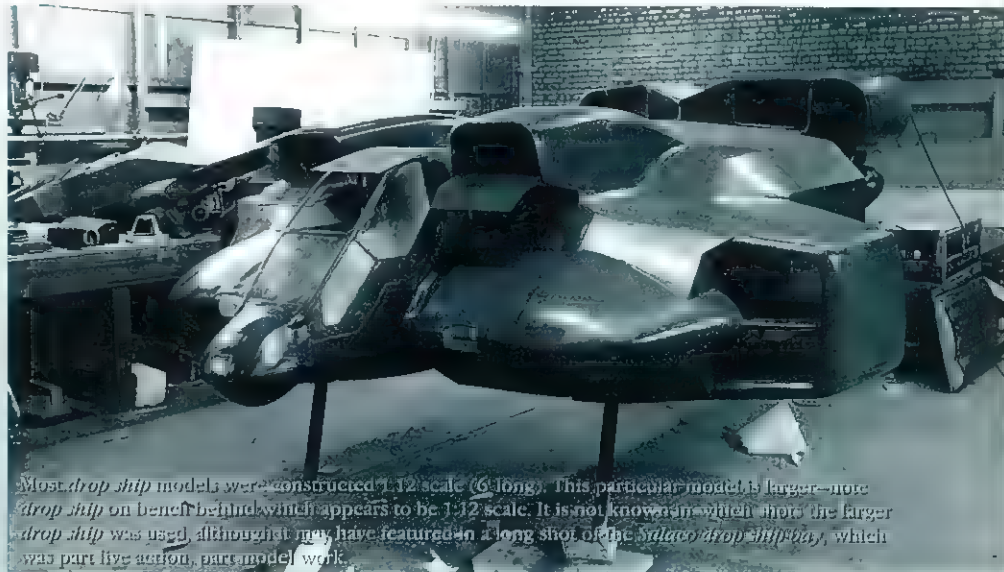


*Colonial Marines Technical Manual* and former *Alien War* London Marine, Doug McCarthy. They cornered the *Alien* by the stage and opened fire on it (with blank firing pistols, I hasten to add), whereupon it ran out of the side entrance, hotly pursued by *Marines*.

Simon apologised for this interruption, mumbling something about a containment breach. He was finishing off by giving a run down of the day's events when *Marines* again ran past the stage and up the aisle followed by an irate *Alien*. The audience was quite amused at this impromptu event.

The first of the day's guests was Lee Brimmicombe-Wood, author of the *Aliens: Colonial Marines Technical Manual*. Lee gave a short account of his time writing the book, admitting that, in hindsight, he would like to change some of its contents. Apparently the book was written to a





Most drop ship models were constructed 1:12 scale (6" long). This particular model is larger—note drop ship on bench behind which appears to be 1:12 scale. It is not known in which shot the larger drop ship was used, although it may have featured in a long shot of the *Salado drop ship bay*, which was part live action, part model work.

very tight schedule, and Lee described how he was still typing away on some extracts while a taxi sat outside waiting to take the finished piece to his publisher. He then took time to answer questions on the contents of the book.

This was followed by a 15-minute video detailing the *Alien War* experience, made up of media footage from the celebrity opening night, adverts for *Alien War London*

and never-seen-before footage of interviews with Sigourney Weaver and others on their opinions of *Alien War*.

Gary Gillies, one of the two creators of *Alien War*, was on hand to talk about its history, surprising the audience with news that *War* would be resurrected in Glasgow, Scotland, in the not too distant future.

The next guest and one of the







Issue 3.  
Lost in Space kits.  
Battlestar: Dave Sisson.  
Adrian Bruce's How-to series.  
Sequester kits, Batter bases.  
Anime - an introduction.  
Gadzilla Vs Mothra.  
1:1 Scale Alien Head.  
Ami/Erli's Kirk Kit.

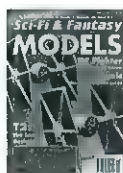


Issue 12.  
Cyborg - Neil Gorton.  
1:1 scale heads.  
Bill Pearson's crash miniatures.  
Mutant artifacts.  
Storyboard artist Jim Caruth.  
Bob Gould's Penguin.  
Judge Anderson.  
Erti's Han Solo Kit.  
Erti Enterprise-B.  
Voyager kit.



Issue 15.  
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Scratchbuild Adcock.  
Steve Bagg - conclusion.  
Goldeneye effects.  
Skyhopper conversion.  
Wonderfest convention.  
Grisson - starship kit.  
Lighting models - part one.  
Wagoner: 1999.

Bladerunner Blaster. Gaster review. Spinner PDI - 15 years of CGI excellence.



Issue 27.  
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Scratchbuild space jockey.  
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Steve Burg, concept artist.  
Scratchbuild Sandman Blaster.  
Reviews: Glencoe's R.M.I., CD Head, Iron Maiden's Eddie, Ami/Erli's twin TIEs, AB models' TBI.

Chiller Theatre. Alien Resurrection's Auriga.



Issue 28.  
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Digital Ornithopter.  
Miniatures of Lost in Space Part 1.  
Creating a fish monster.  
The Model Smith's futuristic vehicles.  
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Reviews: PPK Road, Polar Lights' Frankie Flyver, Glencoe UFO, Revell Starfury special.

Enterprise conversion.  
Scratchbuild Space Station, Foundation Imaging comp special.



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Garage kit sculptor Chris Forward.  
Calibra Digital on Earth: Finn Conflict.  
Miniatures of From the Earth to the Moon part 1.  
Harry Harris' Aliens collector.  
Making warp engines for Star Trek.



Issue 32.  
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Issue 33.  
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Reviews: Terminator, Ertex, Cobra Princess, Bug B, US kit report.



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Last miniatures of Total Recall. Part I.  
Victorian Airship.  
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Reviews: Timeslip Deformers, King Kong's Throne: AT-AT & AT-ST Walkers, 1:1 scale hand props.



Issue 36.  
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Aurora artist Dave Cockrum.  
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A-B Models' FAB I.  
Bill Pearson interview.  
Rick Sternbach on the Voyager Shuttle.  
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Polar Lights' Wallman's wagon.

Space 1999 Ultra Probe.  
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Issue 37.  
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Red Dwarf VIII miniatures pt. 1.  
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Filming The Future Was Fantastic: Chris Gheran and Global Effects.  
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Issue 38.  
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varus from Planet of the Apes.  
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Spectrum Patrol Car: Cult Classics' UFO Alien.  
Polar Lights' Psycho House. Vista Replicas' Lunar Module.  
Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea Driving Bell. Lighting the DS9 Runabout. Cedric the Zombie.



Issue 39.  
Space 1999: Special collector issue—original miniatures, props and costumes; kit history: scratchbuild Meta Probe, Ark 9 Hawk and Eagle Hangar, recreating the Eagle kit. Plus Chemelton Effects, Timeslip Alien Warrior, Planet X Lennon, AMT/Erli's Rancor kit, Harlequin BS figures.



Issue 40.  
Studio 2's UFO Mobile pt 1.  
Ami/Erli's Phantom Menace kits and mini-kits.  
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BS—special make ups.  
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Miniatures for Noah's Ark.  
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Lighting the Deform.



Issue 41.  
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Roy Harryhausen interview—pt. 2.  
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Harnes Reeper: AB Models' 44" Eagle Preview. Meet the garage kit professor.  
Foundation Imaging on Trek and Starship Troopers.  
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Issue 42 (Effects Special issue)  
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Issue 43.  
Crawley Creatures/Framstone on Walking with Dinosaurs.  
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JFD SHADO Control Mobile project.  
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SETNG Pood scratchbuild.  
S. A.B. pt 3.  
Star Wars Cantina kit review.



Issue 45. ALIENS  
Collector Special.  
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Effects Special—  
Collector's issue 1:  
Titanic, Armageddon,  
Landfall, Moby Dick,  
Muppet Movies, Voyager,  
Roar plus  
interviews with Carol  
Bauman of ILM, Steve  
Burg, and Steve Bagg.



Effects Special issue 2:  
The Matrix, Lost World,  
Pitch Black, Astro Knights,  
The Last Train, London's  
Burning, Yumpie  
Prosthetics, Animatronics,  
Effects  
contact lenses.

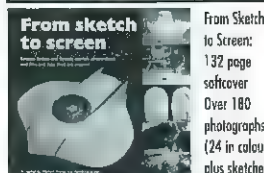
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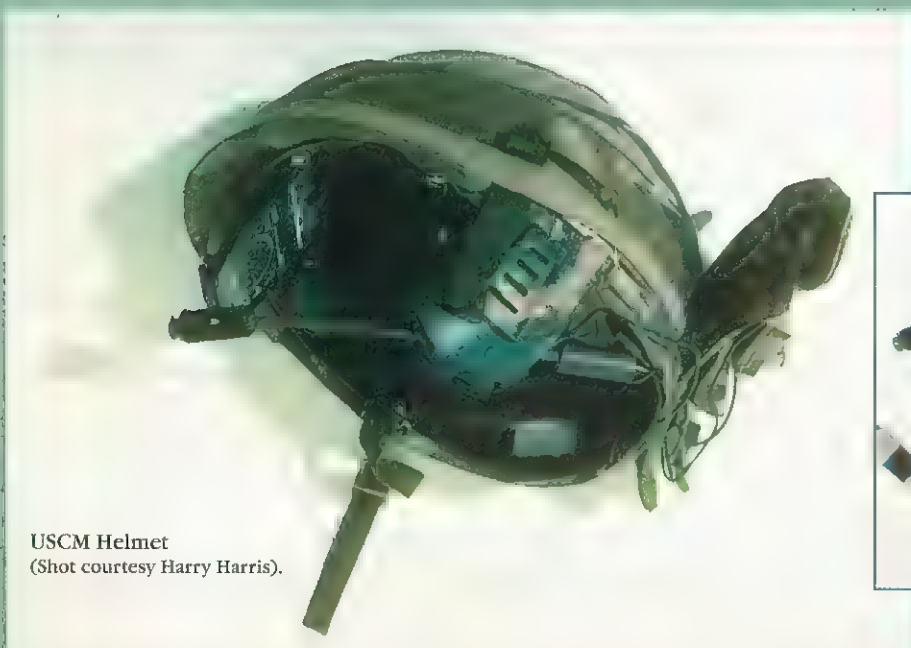


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convention's biggest draws, was Collette Hiller, better known as *Drop ship* pilot *Ferro* in *Aliens*. Collette took a Q & A session on her time on *Aliens*, and provided interesting facts on the making of the film. Although American, Collette now lives with her family in the UK, and has left acting to work as a children's TV producer with the BBC.

At 1.00pm there was a break for lunch and a screening of the *Alien 5* video. Despite confused looks and questions from the audience, this is, in fact, a fan-made film by *Probot Productions* using *Kenner Alien* figures as actors. *Probot*, which comprises US fans Damon Wellner and Sebastian O'Brien, state they are a small, non-profit organisation based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, dedicated to 'Quality Toy Cinema'. *Alien 5* is their first release and you can check out their website: [www.probotproductions.com](http://www.probotproductions.com)

At 2.00pm hordes of people converged on the main room as Lee, Gary and Collette had agreed to sign autographs. Unlike a number of conventions, where one is expected to pay in the region of £15 for an autograph, the only condition here was that you made a contribution to the *Cancer Research Fund*.

Talks resumed at 2.30pm. FX technicians Rob Dickinson (Computer Visuals Designer—*Alien*), Jim Francis (Visual Effects Supervisor—*Red Dwarf*), and SF&F's own Bill Pearson (Model Supervisor—*Alien*) and Steve Begg (2nd Unit Miniature Effects Supervisor—*Aliens*), were kind enough to take time out to come along and support the con by taking part in a Q&A session about their respective special effects careers.

Harry Harris spoke next, taking questions on his *Aliens Prop*

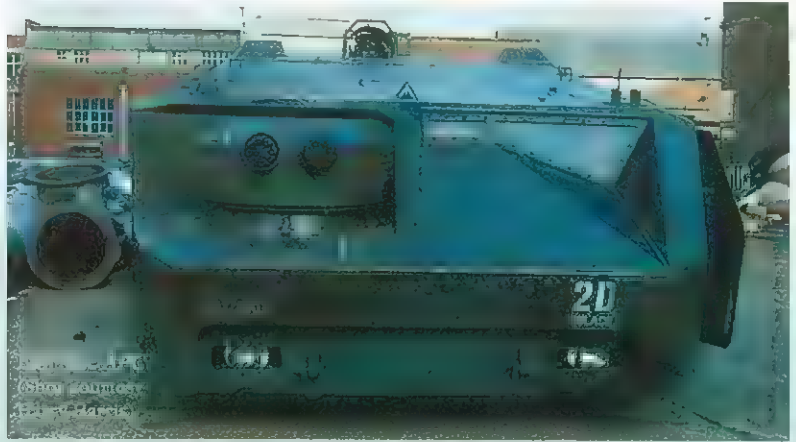


USCM Helmet  
(Shot courtesy  
Harry Harris).

USCM Helmet  
(Shot courtesy Harry Harris).



USCM Helmet  
(Shot courtesy  
Harry Harris).



Full size APC at Alien Power Station (Shot courtesy Harry Harris)



Full size APC (Shot courtesy Harry Harris)

Collection & Archive and Bill Pearson returned to take more questions on his time working on *Alien*. Following this were Jason Kingsley (Creative Director) and Chris Kingsley (Technical Director) of *Rebellion*, the developers of the popular computer game, *Aliens versus Predator*. They talked in depth about the development of the game and other projects they are working on. Harry volunteered for the unenviable job of running around the audience with the microphone.

*Alien 3* actor, Ralph Brown, captivated the audience with his own personal memories of his time on the film. Ralph had actually kept a daily diary in the course of the filming and it proved to be a truly fascinating talk. Ralph finished by signing autographs.

Another big draw was the charity auction. Among the many lots that had been donated were fragments of an original *Aliens* Face-hugger from the *Fan Club* itself and Mike Holland; a reproduction 1/1 *Alien* head from

Doug McCarthy; while Gary Gillies donated three of the most popular items- an original prop Computer Disk from *Aliens* and a replica *Aliens* Face-hugger. Even these paled in comparison to the lot everyone seemed to want, a day as a *Colonial Marine* at *Alien War* in Glasgow. Simon Clarke has recently informed me that the convention raised £1,064 for cancer research, with the auction alone producing in excess of £795 of that total.

All in all it seemed to be a highly enjoyable day for all those who attended. With the last *Aliens Fan Club* convention having taken place in 1993, it was satisfying to see it still has a large and loyal fan base throughout the world. Simon Clarke has already hinted to me that it will not be the last *Aliens* convention to take place—"Aliens Convention 2000? Sure -why not!"

To conclude I shall quote Simon's final comment to us at the *Harry Harris Archive* as we were departing. "Someone told me there was an *Aliens* convention today, though I've been so busy I didn't see it myself!" Simon, we salute you and all your hard work which went into realising the day. On behalf on us all, many, many thanks.

Check out the Aliens Fan Club Website: [www.aliensfanclub.co.uk](http://www.aliensfanclub.co.uk)

Email Simon Clarke:  
[simon@aliensfanclub.co.uk](mailto:simon@aliensfanclub.co.uk)

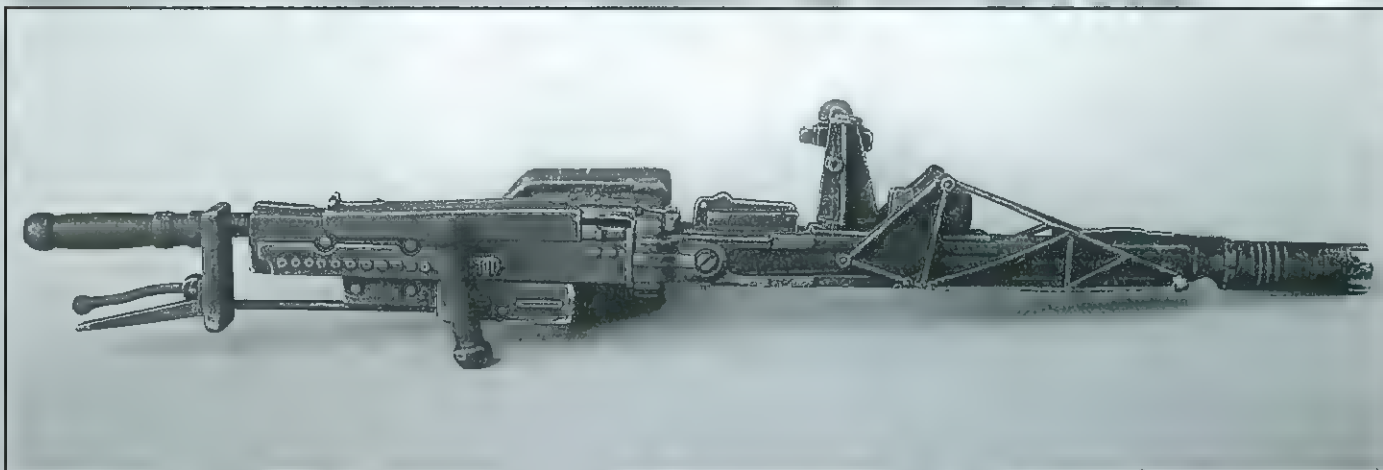
Simon is hunting for photographs of the 1993 Aliens Convention. If you were there and took pics could you please contact him?

*Our second Alien Special (#48) will feature more from Harry including Jordan Tractor blueprints.*



# Chris Chulamanis; EVA Models and the 1/6th United States Colonial Marine Rifleman

geoff topping



**I first encountered the work of Chris Chulamanis late one night whilst surfing the net. As regular readers of SF&F will know, I'm something of an Aliens fan, so when I saw Chris' scratchbuilt 1/6 United States Colonial Marine Rifleman on his website <http://members.aol/M56SG/uscm/html>, I was somewhat blown away by its accuracy and detail.**

Upon further investigation of the site, I found that Chris is no stranger to the world of model making. Although the *Marine* is obviously a sci-fi subject, Chris' first love of factual space exploration is shown through his company *EVA models* and its range of accurate 1/32 models, which includes subjects such as the *Lunar Roving Vehicle* and prominent astronauts such as Alan Shepard. Chris' pieces are acclaimed by such luminaries as *Star Trek*'s Rick Sternbach and serious model makers around the world.

I immediately contacted Chris and, through our correspondence over a period of time, I've seen *the Rifleman* take shape. It's a pleasure to meet a model maker and sculptor who constantly strives to improve upon his skills and Chris exemplifies his art in this subject.

**GT:** Chris can you tell us a little about yourself, your business and where you're based?

**CC:** Like many, I suppose, I'm one of those people who was able to develop a hobby interest into a full time occupation simply because I found a niche market that I was

able to cater to. *EVA* or *Extra-Vehicular Activity Models* is a home-based business located in Parker, Colorado, USA.

Working from home is great. I do all my mold making and resin casting in one part of a well equipped shop in the basement, and another area is used for packing orders for shipment. A second story room, with a view of the Rocky Mountains, serves as a pleasant place to paint my astronaut display models and to create mold masters. A cozy wing off the main bedroom serves as an office where I do all my computer work and process orders.

It's a very comfortable environment and I am fortunate to be able to work from home. I would like to be able to answer the 'phone all the time but when I'm in the middle of a casting session, or out to the Post Office, the answering machine fills in for me.

**GT:** When did you first get into model making?

**CC:** I started building plastic models as a young boy, but my first foray at model making *per se* began with an ambitious project in the early eighties. The decision

to scratch build a 33.5 inch model of the submarine *Nautilus*, as designed by Harper Goff, was my first real attempt at model making. (View Chris' *Nautilus* site at: <http://members.aol.com/ccspevam/Ntlstry.html>.)

What I brought to the *Nautilus* project was love, patience and determination bordering on obsession. I had no idea what I was getting into or how to approach the project so I did a lot of asking around for advice. I learned, early on, that seeking help from those more experienced can be extremely beneficial. The *Nautilus* model was a milestone for me. It's what led up to all my current model making activities. At the time, I had no idea where it would eventually lead.

Even today, looking at the completed model of the *Nautilus* perched on brass supports in the display case, complete with a miniature reef and a figure of *Captain Nemo* in full diving dress, evokes mixed emotions in me. I'm amazed that I actually built the model and still delighted about how well my first attempt scratchbuilt project turned out.

When I built the *Nautilus* I had only an inkling of my modest model making ability. Based on reactions from my discriminating wife and, later, from others, I began to realize that perhaps I had a degree of talent that could be developed. The learning curve is always ahead of me. Sometimes it is steeper and more worrisome, but that is what makes the ongoing learning process interesting, fun and challenging.





GT: When did you establish *EVA Models*?

CC: *EVA* was established in 1996 while I was still working full time at a local community college in Miami, Florida. I started sculpting Astronaut figures in 1/32 scale because I could not find anything in the general market that pleased me. The *Nautilus* was built for the same reason as I could not find a model kit of it and as it happens the thrust of all my models' themes relate directly to the scarcity of them in the general market. Deep sea divers and spacemen engage my interest. It's hard to say why, exactly, but I think it's because a figure in a space suit or diving dress imputes the qualities of pioneering adventure and heroism into a singular, tangible element that can be held easily in one's hands. As a child, a toy diver or spaceman was a conduit for my imaginary adventures. While the sense of play has left me, I still enjoy having them around to look at.

From the beginning I realized that *EVA Models* would be successful only if I were to maintain a presence and market on the Internet. Investing in a computer and learning all the intricacies of developing a presence in cyberspace, as it turns out, was as important as developing my sculpting skills. Relationships developed on the Internet would encourage me and my success. Had it not been for people like

Sven Knudson, Glenn Johnson, and Rob Caswell who have their own websites on the Internet:

[www.eninfinger.org.sven.models.models.html](http://www.eninfinger.org.sven.models.models.html), [www.realspacemodels.com](http://www.realspacemodels.com), and [www.starshipmodeler.com](http://www.starshipmodeler.com) respectively, *EVA Models* may not have thrived. Thanks, guys!

Equally as important to the development of *EVA* was the kind and generous help I received from *Kendall Model Company*, Jeff Verswijvel and Willy Peeters. Despite undergoing tremendous growing pains in their own business at the time, they were kind enough to take me under their wings and teach me the fine art of mold making and resin casting. I was fortunate to have learned from masters in the field.

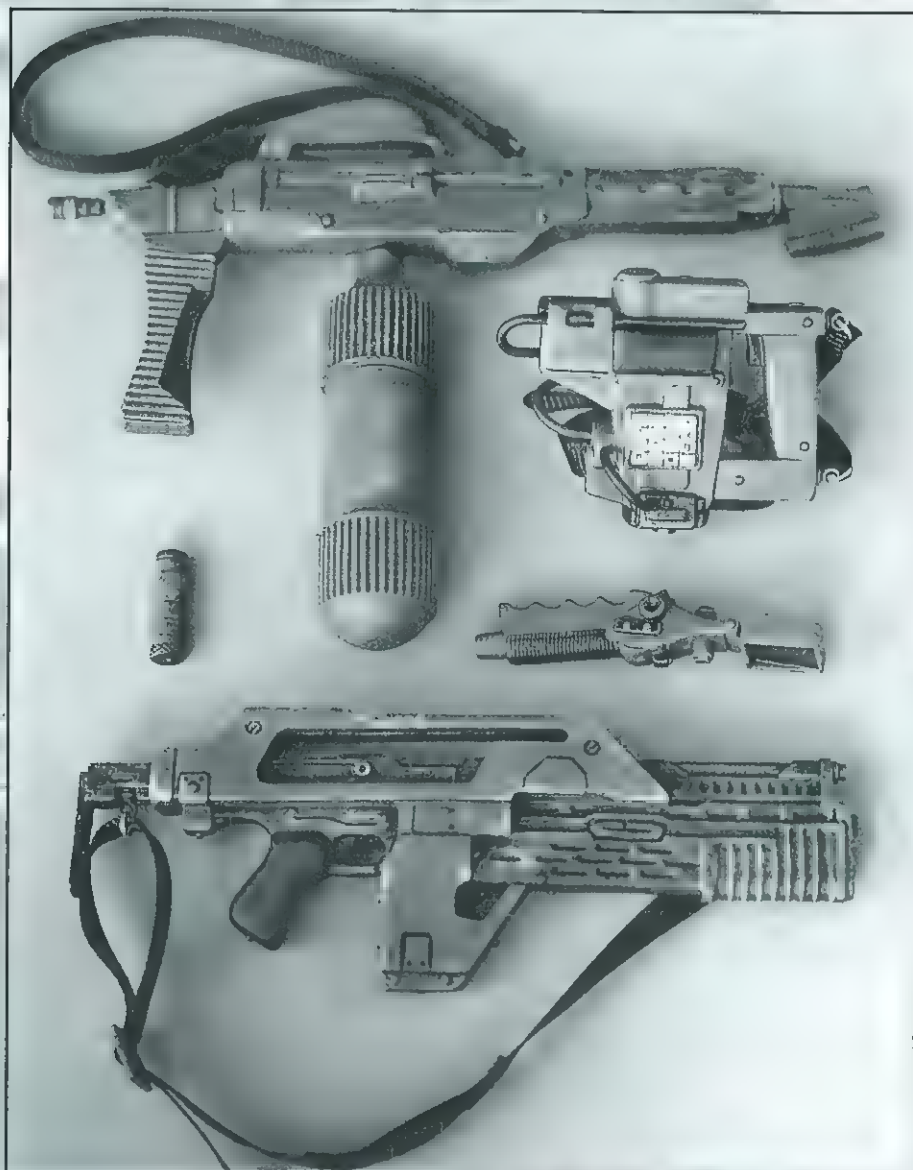
GT: What gave you the inspiration for the *United States Colonial Marine Rifleman*?

CC: The inspiration for the kit came straight out of the movie *Aliens*. The overall, no nonsense look of the *Marines* and their equipment appealed to my sense of realism. The factors that determined the

final look of the *Marines* and their equipment in *Aliens*, whether based on budget constraints or expediency, worked favorably in the hands of the creators. The artfully blended elements of the new and old, accentuated by abuse and wear, yielded a look that was truly unique and unrivaled. I think it's safe to say that the characteristic *Colonial Marine* look portrayed in *Aliens* has endured the test of time well.

GT: How did you approach this piece?

CC: The 1/6 scale figure customizing realm was new to me. I toyed with the approach of designing my own hybrid *Marine* armor and weapons, which would have been easier to do, but what I, and others, really wanted was an authentic looking *Colonial Marine* with articulating armor and all the accessories. Left with no latitude for conceptualization, I was compelled to do the research and produce fairly authentic looking armor and weapons.







Again, there were none to be found in the general market so I found myself embarking on a project, with a steep learning curve, to make my own. In short, the project was approached with the goal of achieving a convincing degree of authenticity.

GT: There must have been a lot of research involved in its creation. What sources of reference did you utilize in order to establish complete authenticity?

CC: If sitting in front of the television for hours, sketch pad and remote in hand, qualifies as research, then, yes, a lot of research went into identifying all the elements and details of the *Colonial Marine* armor and equipment. The overall dark lighting compounded the difficulty of identifying details. Even when going frame by frame some details never fully revealed themselves, so alternative sources of reference materials had to be employed.

The *Aliens: Colonial Marines Technical Manual* by Lee Brimmicombe-Wood

proved to be a wonderful and entertaining source of information and photographs, and a nice break from viewing the *Aliens* video on the television. The book includes excellent photographs of *Marine* equipment from the Harry Harris collection and elaborates on *Colonial Marine* armor and weapons. It was a very useful reference source for creating the *Rifleman* kit. By the way... Lee is a super guy!

Harry Harris was also very helpful to me directly. He sent me numerous JPEG





photo files of *Marine* equipment via the Internet, and even sent a set of plans for the APC. Harry, what can I say? Thanks for all the help!

Last, but not least, I also used an article from *SF&F* that you wrote: *The Collector: an interview with Harry Harris, Aliens* archivist. From that I was able to glean information that allowed me to include the final details on the kit, including a fairly accurate revision of the helmet-camera, the Gerber G-5707 combat knife, and the shoulder lamp bracket that was only slightly visible in the video and not shown in any of the *Aliens: Colonial Marines Technical Manual* pictures.

**GT:** Why did you use the *GI-Joe* action figure?

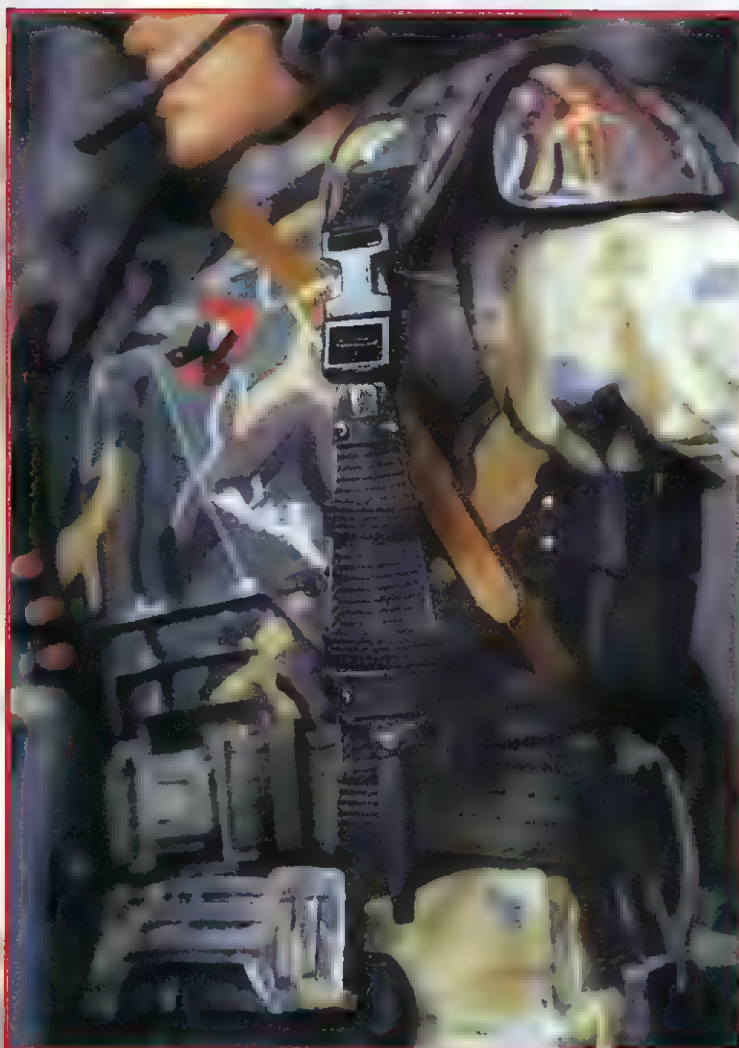
**CC:** It's probably accurate to say that *GI-Joe* is recognized as the paradigm for the twelve-inch action figure. Simply stated, it is a 1/6 scale model with tremendous, and as yet untapped, potential. Developing trends, without a doubt, attest to the enormous potential for the 1/6 scale market. In my opinion, the twelve-inch figure encompasses all the elements of traditional modeling and then some. Articulation is a wonderful benefit.

The combination of fabrics, plastics, rubber and even electronics, in conjunction with articulation, make for the most realistic models imaginable. I wanted my *United States Colonial Marine* figures to be big and fully articulated; the choice was easy.

**GT:** Can you describe the process you undertook in making the figure's armor?

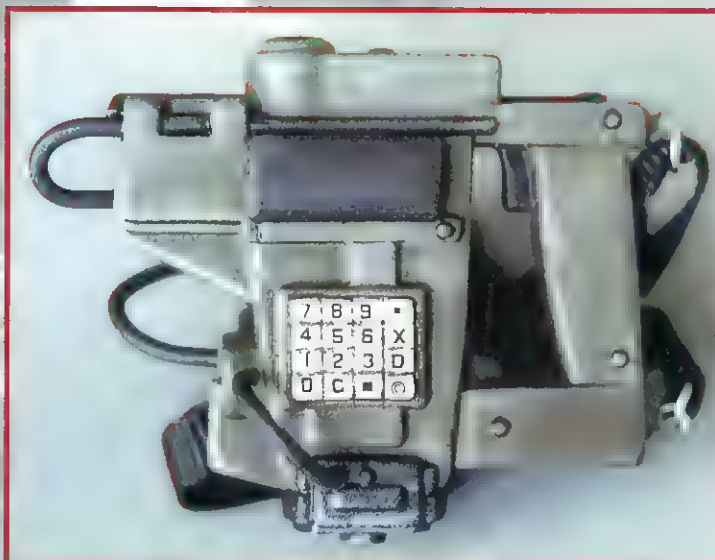
**CC:** Making the armor for the figure was something I had thought a lot about before I actually got into it. I considered vacuum forming the armor but soon realized that vacuum formed parts, because they would be thin, would not make good mold masters for production resin casting. I figured that the parts would be easily broken while removing them from the seamless molds.

After a bit of experimenting, I decided to sculpt the armor, using *Super Sculpey*



and *Milliput* directly over a figure that was covered in aluminum foil.

**GT:** What other materials did you utilise in the sculpt?



**CC:** I detailed the basic armor components with scale aluminum rivets, styrene strips, styrene sheet, styrene rod, and styrene discs made with a *Waldron* sub-miniature punch and die set.

**GT:** How did you create the accessories like the *PDT* (Personal Data Transmitter) and *M41A Pulse Rifle*? Even though it's to scale with the *GI-Joes*, in my opinion, the *Pulse Rifle* appears to be more accurately detailed than most of the 1/1 scale prop replicas currently on the market. Is it a reworked *Hicks vs. Aliens* version, a build-up on a *Joe*-scale *M1A1 Thompson*, or a complete scratchbuild?

**CC:** Funny you should ask that. The 1/6 scale version of the *M41A Pulse Rifle* fooled a few people, who didn't read the print on my website. When one person learned it was not a 1/1 version he wrote back, "Oh God, please, *pleeeeee*, tell me it ain't so!" The *M41A Pulse Rifle* is a reworked piece from the *Hicks vs. Aliens* set.

Since I considered the rifle a focal point of the kit, I took great pains in incorporating all the details I found on the film version weapon into a highly reworked weapon. The barrel and heat shroud were totally rebuilt. I had to move the barrel slightly rearward and build up the detail using sheet

styrene, strip styrene and aluminum tubing.

I added rivet details where they were lacking all around and I drilled in the roll pin holes. The hand grip was flattened a bit too. The front of the rifle also had to be rebuilt to more closely represent the grenade launcher barrel and detail and, lastly, I sanded down the top of the carry handle and put in the sight rail groove.

The kit *M41A* has metal attach points and rings for the sling strap webbing and a foam pad for the strap, just like in the movie version. I'm happy with it.

Accessories like the *PDT* and *Locator* were a lot of fun to make as they are both highly detailed, very small, and simple to create.

The *PDT* was pieced together from bits of styrene stock and carefully sanded smooth to

shape. The key pad was a piece of sample photoetching removed from a unique set of business cards that David Barnes had given me when I met him in July, 1997 at the *IPMS Convention and Show* in Santa Clara. David Barnes did the photoetching





for my *Lunar Rover* kit. I never throw away anything that could be considered useful. That little piece of photo etching came in very handy as, initially, I was going to set all twenty eight key pad buttons in one at a time using plastic discs. Discovering alternative methods for doing things is fun and my experience tells me that the simplest alternatives are usually the best.

The *Locator* was made using a miniature lathe. Grooves were cut into a section of aluminum tubing and that was all that was necessary to create the body of the unit.

The knurling detail for the bottom cap and the mesh for the top were simulated with a very small expanded brass mesh glued into place. The display window is a thin sheet of styrene glued in place and the button was a scale aluminum rivet. I filled the tube with clay and glued a styrene disk to the bottom and it was done. Filling the tube with clay was necessary to avoid the infiltration of molding compound during the mold making vacuum process.

The *Incinerator* was made using a chopped up *M-16* rifle, building around the remaining portions using sheet styrene, styrene rod, strips, and aluminum rivets. The knob on the end was turned on a lathe. I could not find anything that clearly showed the detail on the right side of the *Incinerator* so I took liberties by adding functional looking details in appropriate locations to come up with a convincing appearance.

The *Incinerator* fuel tank was quick and easy to make from a piece of copper tube, off-the-shelf end caps and an acrylic sphere cut down to serve as the bottom of the tank.

Jef Verswijvel of *Kendall Model Company* made the *Gerber G-5707* combat knife as a favor. Working from a photograph, he created the mold master from styrene using a milling machine and a lathe. It came out really super.

I used it to make the knife in

a sheath. I actually made a fabric sheath out of webbing material to get the texture and then detailed it, adding the tip guard and rivets made of styrene. The retaining strap that goes around the handle was a small piece of ribbon detailed with a plastic disc to simulate the snap. It's a nice little piece, and I was glad to have help with it.

Speaking of help, I was very fortunate to have met a really talented fellow in the *GI-Joe* news group—*The Sandboxes* (alt.toys.gi-joe). John Hays (ajhays@pressroom.com) had noticed my *USCM Rifleman Squad* entry in a *Sandbox* contest and contacted me about it. He is a very encouraging sort of person and, as it turns out, he is an excellent illustrator as well.

When it came time to produce the kit, John stepped up to the plate and took on the job of designing the box art and doing all the illustrations and layout for the comprehensive instruction booklet included as part of the kit. Truthfully, John had a big part in bringing the *USCM Rifleman kit* to market... Thanks, John!

**GT:** Do you have any future projects concerned with the *Aliens* theme?

**CC:** There is another *Aliens* related project already in the works. A *USCM Rifleman Squad* would not be complete

without a *Smart Gunner*, and I've made a prototype kit version of the *Smart Gun*.

**GT:** How on earth did you produce the *Smart Gun*? Did you utilise a *Joe*-scale *MG-42/MG-3* general purpose machine gun as a base or did you scratch build it? (Or, dear reader, is this man in possession of a shrinking device and is he unscrupulously reducing original props to this scale?)

**CC:** The *M56 Smart Gun* was really quite easy and fun to make. Yes, I built the 1/6 scale *Smart Gun* starting from an existing *Joe* scale *MG-42*. The movie version was built up around a practical *MG-42* series *GPMG*, so it served as an excellent foundation. I started by cutting off all unnecessary parts.

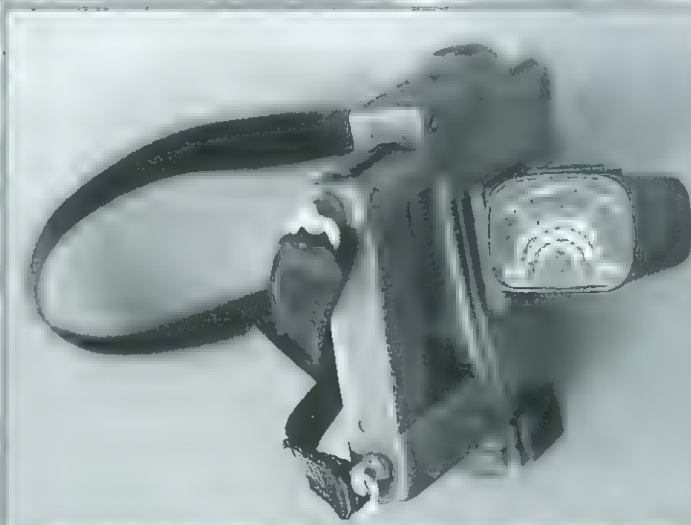
The hand grip, trigger, bi-pod mount, flash suppresser and the butt plate of the gun were carefully and quickly removed with a hand saw. I sanded out all the rough edges and some of the existing mold seam lines. I then went to work adding details that would transform what was left into a convincing representation.

I guess the most time consuming part of the gun itself was making the flash suppresser. Using a suitably sized piece of aluminum tubing I turned the flash suppresser on a miniature lathe to cut in the grooves and mark where the holes would be drilled. After it was cut to size, I drilled out the holes. Filing out the front notches took a little time but, by working slowly and carefully, I got it right the first time.

After it was done it looked pretty good so I went on to the next part. I tend to work starting from the most difficult parts first. The frames on either side of the gun were made using strips of styrene. I made one then copied it for the other side. Triangular pieces of styrene sheet were used to fill the aft area of the frames.

Holes were drilled through the lower main body of the gun to accept the styrene rod crossbars that held the two frames together, and onto the gun body. The top crossbar was made from a thicker piece of styrene rod. I used a miniature punch and die set to make the disks and bolt details that dressed out the ends of the crossbars.

The three handles (front trigger handle, rear grip and cocking handle) were turned from a piece of hardwood dowel. A hole was drilled into the top of the main body of the gun to accept the aluminum support bar for the front trigger handle. The detail around the support bar was made using styrene strips.





The little box unit that integrates the safety/burst selector, fuse selector, and firing switch was made from bits of styrene. Through this a hole was drilled so that the front firing handle could be securely attached, with a steel pin, to the aluminum support bar.

A small section of styrene tube was added to the right side of the support tube structure to serve as the plug-in connector for the wire that comes off the side.

The housing for the *infrared tracker* was made from a piece of aluminum that was turned on a lathe and then filed to shape. A red plastic lens from an automobile kit was fitted into a hole in the front of it to serve as the IR projector lens.

The rear firing handle was made from a piece of styrene rod with a small acrylic sphere glued to the end. The handle guard was made from a flat piece of styrene that was filed to shape. A hole was drilled into the rear of the main gun body to accept the aluminum tube that supports the back plate for the firing handle, handle guard, and rear grip.

Two pieces of thick styrene flat stock make up the structure beneath the main gun body adjacent to the cocking handle from which the extension rod of the firing handle connects. This was detailed with flat notched styrene sheet and several bolt details.

The cocking handle was attached to the side of this structure with a steel pin. The other details seen on the main gun body, like the feed cover access and barrel cover access, were made from pieces of flat styrene stock, cut and filed to shape. Bolt details made from styrene discs were added to these.

The original gun body lacked the overlap side detail for the ammo access feed cover. I added strips of styrene to make it look more three dimensional.

A hole was drilled into the main gun body, below the barrel cover access area, to accept a piece of aluminum tubing that serves as the mounting point for the articulation arm.

The main body of the ammo drum was made from a couple of appropriately sized plastic caps joined together. Plastic caps come in handy and I always save them. A cover made of flat styrene stock, with a small window notch, was added to the top of the drum.

Steel washers and various bits of styrene were used to finish detail the ammo drum. A wing structure, reinforced with styrene rods, was added to the side of the drum so it could be inserted in to the ammo feed slot of the gun.

**GT:** Realising the *Smart Gun* harness and chest armour must have involved a lot of research and work. How and with what materials were these pieces made?

**CC:** The shoulder and hip padding was made from strips of neoprene rubber cut to shape. The articulation arm mounting plate is a piece of styrene with a steel flange attached to support the articulation arm.

The breast plate was pieced together using fairly thick pieces of flat styrene stock. I beveled the edges of these pieces, using a sanding block, to make good joint surfaces.

The arm mount and breastplate are attached to the figure with 3/8 black elastic webbing over the neoprene, and secured with *Velcro* tabs. Very simple, really.

The *Smart Gun sight* was made from pieces of styrene and detailed with styrene strips and disks. The sight has six points of articulation. Steel pins provide the support at most of the points. The eyepiece was adapted from a part in the *Hasbro Aliens*

The illustrations in the *Aliens: Colonial Marine Technical Manual* came in real handy for building the gun, sight, articulation arm, and the breast plate.

Harry Harris and Willie Goldman also sent me some good pictures to work from. They both have really great *Aliens* sites on the Internet, and I highly recommend a visit to all those who are fans of the *Alien* films and the *Colonial Marines*. The URL for the Harry Harris Aliens Collection & Archive website is [www.encom.demon.co.uk](http://www.encom.demon.co.uk), and Willie's *Aliens* collection comsite is [www.alienscollection.com](http://www.alienscollection.com). Check them out!

A *Remote Sentry Gun* is something I'd like to do but getting my hands on good reference material seems to be the limiting factor on this project at this time.

A 1/6 scale kit of the *APC* would be awesome. I have a 1/6 scale vehicle project



vs. *Corporal Hicks* figure set.

A coiled wire from the bottom of the sight connects to a plug mounted at the right side of the breast plate, and a commo cord coming from the left side of the microphone boom tucks behind the breast plate. The nice thing about this little unit is that it can be easily adjusted to fit right over the eye of the figure.

The articulation arm on the prototype unit has a slightly longer link between the two main parts as I needed the extra length to make it work on the figure.

The prototype arm was made using the winged pieces of *Molly* bolts for the main structures. Connectors were fabricated using thick styrene flat stock and the whole thing is held together loosely with steel rods.

The arm articulation is quite good and it will come with the *Smart Gun* kit, already in development. It will look more like the conventional arm and will articulate.

in the works now. If it develops well I will pursue developing the *APC* kit. An airlock door display base is a consideration too.

**GT:** What about other Sci-Fi genres?

**CC:** Well, going back to *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, I see a 1/6 scale *Captain Nemo* in the future.

**GT:** What's in the future for *EVA Models*?

**CC:** Hmmm... hard to say beyond what I've already revealed. I will continue making new 1/32 scale astronaut figures to add to the existing *EVA Models* astronaut line.

**GT:** Many thanks, Chris. We look forward to seeing your future projects.

**CC:** My pleasure Geoff! Thank you.

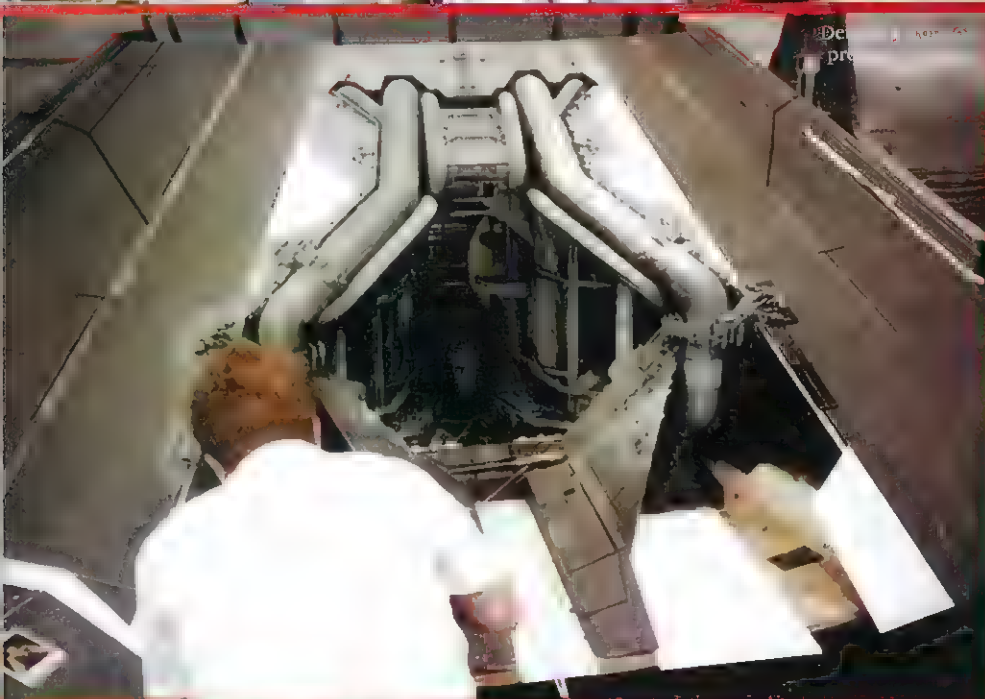




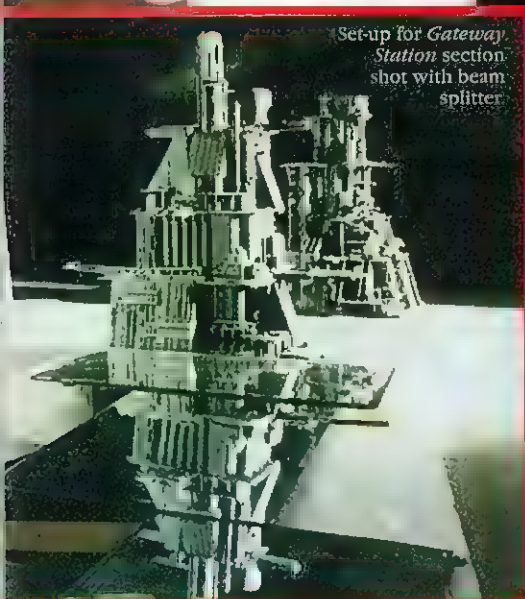
Sulaco miniature detailed by Pat McClung.



Command Centre live action set



Set-up for Gateway Station section shot with beam splitter



...continued from page 27.

"We found ourselves working very close with the main unit because there was so much process work with the actors. They needed almost all of the miniature work up front because a lot of it would be used for process with 1st unit. The shoot was taking place from mid-September through the end of January. I remember Oct, November and December was day after day of process photography so we had to build these miniatures very fast. All of this very elaborate stuff was needed very quickly and there was a lot of it. Many of it going at once. And we were just barely getting the concept drawings in time.

"I was storyboarding the movie as we were going along with Roger Dear. I would work on boards myself or with Roger and then run them down to Jim for approval. The pace was very intense!"

### The Power Loader

The *Power Loader* fight proved to be one of the film's most challenging sequences. Skotak notes that it was often debated what medium would be



used to create the *Loader* and the *Queen*.

"Jim wanted to originally do the *Power Loader* as stop motion but he had to make concessions to the budget so that idea was abandoned and I agreed with the decision. I didn't think it would look right. Ultimately we decided to create a rod puppet for the *Loader*, which worked great. There is one shot in there I'm not very happy with, it looks a little lurchy. We actually had the idea of a third scale miniature, which would have been operated by a midget that we would have shot on a miniature stage. But Jim dropped that idea. We just realized that our budget didn't allow us to do everything we wanted to and also there were things we didn't need. It was too pricey to do it that way.

"The full size *Power Loader* was basically a costume with an operator inside. And a crane, which was supporting the weight, assisted them."

It was a fairly lightweight suit that Sigourney was sitting in front of with the stunt man/operator making all of the movements.



Ultimately Skotak hired famed stop motion effects artist Doug Beswick and Phil Notaro to construct the rod puppet of the *Alien Queen* and the smaller *Power Loader* that would be manipulated on set for wider shots on a miniature of the *Sulaco's* cargo hold.

"We were sending them photographs and measurements and having endless conversations over the 'phone about the constructions of the rod puppets," Notes Skotak. "So we knew we would have that to pick up those shots we couldn't get with live action.

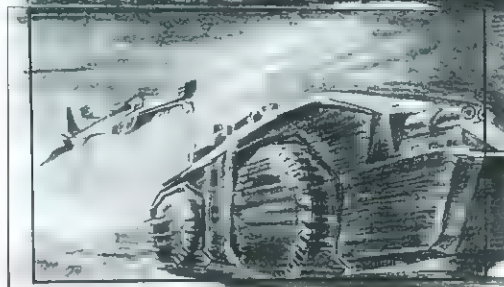
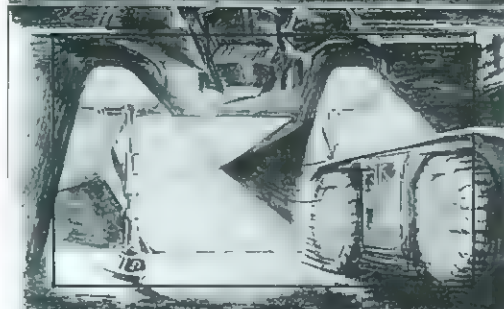
"It was good that Jim came down to choreograph these shots. Especially because we gave up a lot of our people and equipment for inserts and pick-up shots. We had a guy named Nigel on our team who was operating the *Queen's* ovipositor because he had this long reach. We get this thing set-up and it was one of the most difficult set-ups I have ever been involved with. People puppeting eggs; there was steam being shot up through the set; there were fire bars all around the set-up; there was freon being sprayed in front of the lens; the *Alien Queen* was being puppeted. The Pan-head was very low to the ground, which also made it a difficult shot. We get all set to shoot this thing with all these effects being choreographed. Then we'd get this call from the other side of the stage where Jim was shooting inserts of Sigourney's hand in the *Power Loader* and he needed Nigel because his hand closely matched Sigourney's. He, of course, had priority. So we would shut down, Nigel would pull his hand from the ovipositor, get cleaned up and get in the *Ripley* outfit so Jim could shoot his hands with the *Loader* toggle switch.

### Atmosphere processor and Queen's lair

"There was a point where Jim was on our stage a lot. There came a point where he was shooting the shots of the *face-huggers* skittering along the floor," states Skotak, "He brought in sections of the floor outside the med-lab to shoot these inserts and it got very cramped for us as we were running out of space. We had miniatures literally everywhere!"

Once *Ripley* rescues *Newt*, she finds herself deep within the *Alien* hive and face to face with the *Alien Queen*. While she escapes she fires her grenades into the *Queen's* ovipositor where they destroy the ubiquitous eggs.

"We brought in a sharp shooter for the scene where *Ripley* fires into the egg-sac, which was filled with methocelulose. We had to clear out the set for safety reasons and shut down everything. That was done with real gunfire with layers and layers of



APC drop story board sequence. Below. Bob Skotak looks on as the *Drop Ship* is prepared for filming.

wood to catch the ammo. There were set ups for the entire movie. We had two scales of cargo locks. We had the egg chamber and a set called 'The Maw' which was the industrial interior of the atmosphere processor. It was one of the largest of the miniature sets. It ran the entire length of 'M' stage and was over 20 feet high. There was scaffolding and explosions everywhere. Wherever there was room we were shooting footage of the *Drop Ship* shooting through the clouds using fog and wind machines. It was absolute pandemonium. I've never seen anything like it. People crawling over each other to get around. I talked [to] some people during the shoot and they said they had never seen an effects or miniature shoot that was that intense."

According to Dennis Skotak one of the most difficult shots was the *Alien Queen* pulling away from her egg sac. "This seemingly simple close-up was to become the most irritating shot to pull off (no pun intended) because of the laws of physics (getting two slimy surfaces to glue together and then pull apart on cue while fifteen people and fire effects are all working according to plan) and the need for plain old good luck."

The hard work for the Visual Effects team would ultimately pay off. In 1987, *Aliens* was nominated for four *Academy Awards*<sup>TM</sup>, including Best Actress (Sigourney Weaver). It eventually won two oscars—Best Visual Effects (Bob Skotak, Stan Winston, John Richardson) and Best Sound Effects Editing.

*Special thanks to Bob and Dennis Skotak for their participation in the creation of this article. Also thanks to Brian Anthony and Bob Burns.*

Pictures supplied by Bob and Dennis Skotak and from the collection of the author.

*Aliens* © Twentieth Century Fox.

Paul Taglianetti takes an in depth look at the FX of *Alien 3* and *Alien 4* in issue 48





# Interview with an ALIEN

Alec Gillis and Tom Woodruff, Jr. of Amalgamated Dynamics, Inc.

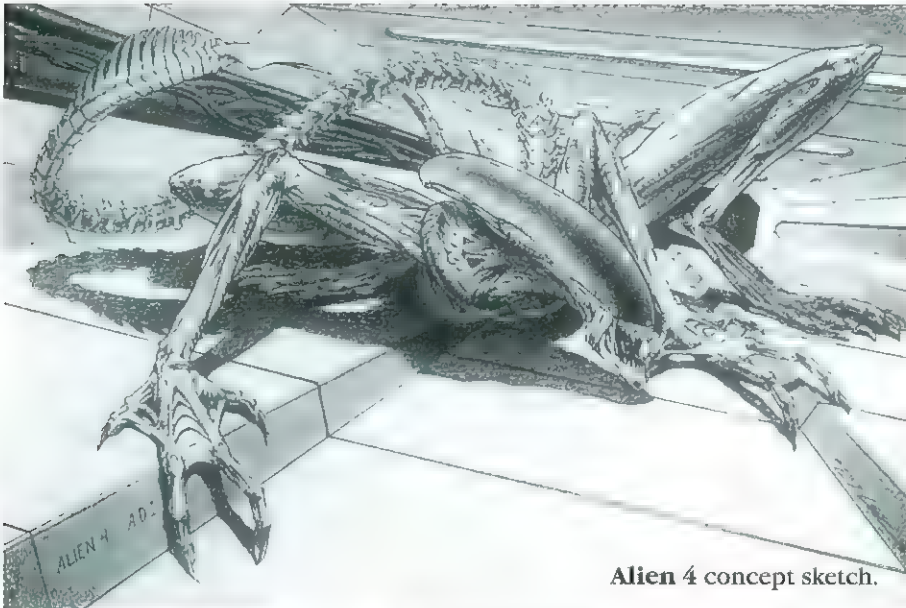


lee shargel

**T**he studio is located on the corner of Winetka and Plummer in Chatsworth, California, USA. It is a delightfully unassuming edifice that conceals the most terrifying creature ever projected on a motion picture screen. The building itself is without sign or markings that might give the innocent passerby even the slightest hint as to what lies within. This is the home of Amalgamated Dynamics, Inc., one of the world's finest, most creative Special Effects companies.

It was here, beyond the rows of neatly manicured shrubbery and tailored landscaping, I found the *ALIEN* that has entertained, thrilled and terrified movie audiences the world over. And it was in this place, this small slice of California suburbia, that I met the men responsible for the animatronic creation—*Academy Award*™ winners Alec Gillis and Tom Woodruff, Jr.





Alien 4 concept sketch.



The real story of the **Alien** trilogy—*plus one*—could never be told without historical reference to these two men who, from humble beginnings, have moved on to build one of the best SFX studios in the world. The road that lead them to **Aliens**, **Alien 3** and **Alien 4**—and a host of other spectacular motion pictures—was a strange one indeed, yet one that would allow their skills as sculptors and craftsman to be honed to a fine edge at the studio of one of the greatest special effects artists of that time, Stan Winston.

### Two Kids on the Block

Tom Woodruff, Jr. was born January 20, 1959 and grew up in the small town of Williamsport, Pennsylvania. During the same period Alec Gillis, born August 29 of the same year in Phoenix, Arizona, eventually moved to a small suburb of Los Angeles in California. Little did they know as children that someday they would join forces to help bring one of the most terrifying and blood-curdling creatures to the motion picture screen. Yet that is exactly what happened. For the features **Alien 3** and **Alien Resurrection**, Alec would be behind the scenes, always watching out for his partner, while Tom would be—literally—inside the creature!

Both men had similar childhoods. They spent their time reading comic books, building models, (of course, the *Aurora Monsters*) and going to the movies with dreams of becoming the next Ray Harryhausen firmly planted in their dreams. As kids, both Tom and Alec dabbled in make-up effects and small stop-motion characters. By the age of 13, both had become amateur filmmakers, running around the back yard with 'Dad's' 8mm movie camera. Enlisting friends as actors, Tom in Pennsylvania and Alec in California began producing the kind of work that would someday make them famous. Like any fledgling effects artists, they were very popular when Halloween came around. Although Alec said he was a shy teenager, when he wore a mask he could 'really cut loose'. Typical garage type kid stuff? Not a chance! These guys were following a dream and nothing would stand in their way. It would take years for them to hone their craft but each knew being a special effects artist and someday making their own feature films was just a matter of time.



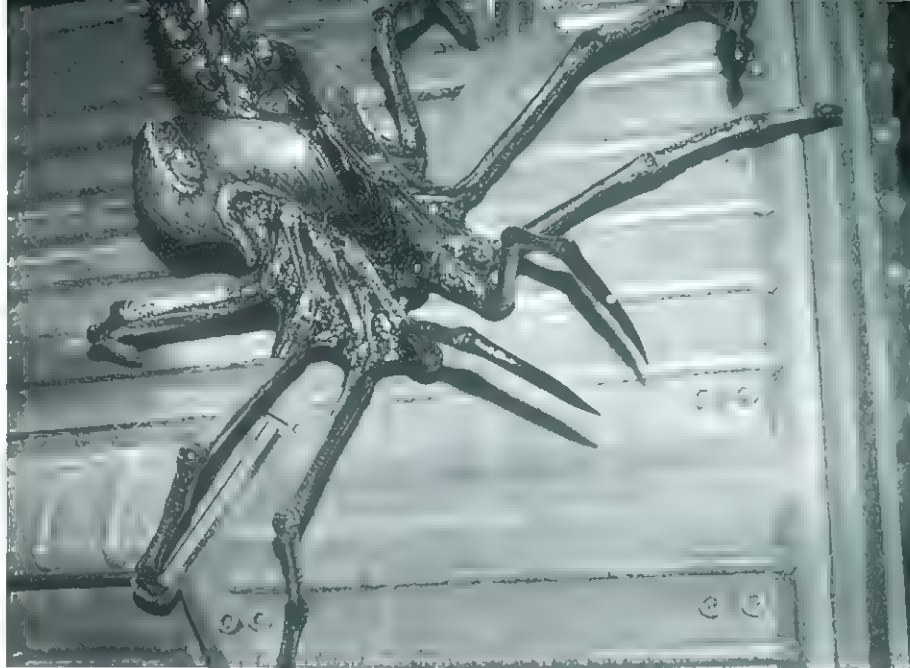
Tom, who attended film school in New York (for two weeks), would eventually gravitate to a local community college as Alec, who hoped to attend the prestigious *USC Film School*, was instead accepted to the art school.

Wanting to make films, Alec decided instead to attend a community college. Eight years later, he would realize his dream of attending UCLA's Film School. Meanwhile, back in Pennsylvania, Tom knew he had to follow his dream. So, following graduation and a short stint as a clerk in a camera store, he and his wife packed up and it was off to Hollywood. Alec, who lived just a few doors down from Tinseltown, felt he might as well have lived on the moon for all the benefit living in LA brought him. But the goal of working in the movie business and creating special effects was a burning desire neither hardship or diversity could extinguish. Their future was rushing to meet them both and, when it did, they would be ready, willing and able to meet the demands.

As Tom and Alec both remarked to me, "There wasn't any special effects school you could attend in those days, nor were there any specific books you could buy, save one or two, that would give you even a clue how to create an animatronic monster, prosthetic beast or make-up special effect. For the most part, it was learn as you go. But where could you go?"

A good question and one which was answered for them both. As mentioned, Tom ended up working as a clerk for a camera store in Hollywood (*Deja Vu*). It might have been a dead end, but, as fate would have it (and after six months of making the rounds of effects studios) he landed a job at Tom Burman's studio. While there he worked on **Buckaroo Banzai** and **Star Trek 3**. Soon he learned of a position opening up at another studio... Stan Winston's. They were prepping for the movie **Terminator**. That was the beginning of Tom's five year association with Stan. Meanwhile, Alec found his own way to make ends meet, doing odd jobs and attending college. His first professional job was at Roger Corman's (then called *New World*). He brought one of his friends along, who also got hired.

His friend's name was Jim Cameron. (**Titanic**) One day they







both had the good fortune to be invited to work for the master himself, Stan Winston. Tom went first and worked on **the Terminator**. Alec, already committed to do the film **Friday the 13th, part 4**, followed later. It was at Winston's studio that the two met and forged a lifelong friendship.

#### Learning from the Master

When Stan had the opportunity to do **Terminator**, it really allowed Tom the freedom to expand his special effects talents and, as a result, he took the genre of mechanical effects to new heights. The *endoskeleton* of **Terminator** was a challenge and a huge success. Tom said, "Stan would bring into the shop machined and stamped metal parts for us to handle and examine. It was

a great way to get the true ergonomic feel for what we were creating. It was also the first time that I had a real script to use as a reference for the project. Stan had given me the script for **Terminator** and asked me to read it for reference and inspiration in creating the special effects. It was a turning point.

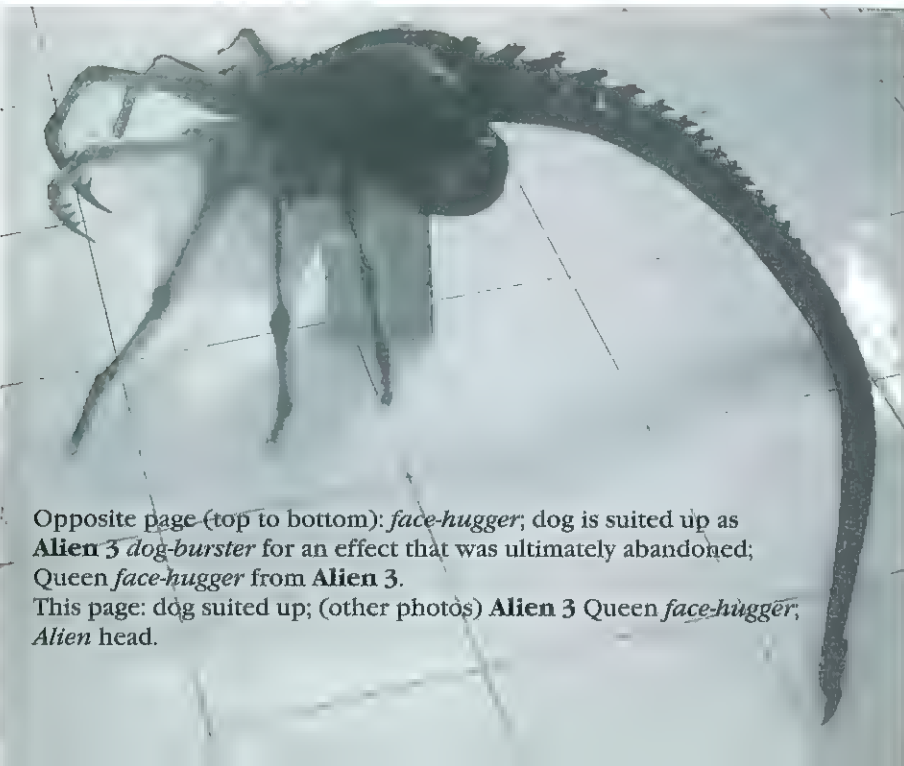
"We were all trying new things; working with new materials and pushing the special effects envelope to its limits."

When Alec joined the team at Stan's, the first project he worked on with Tom was a movie called **Invaders from Mars**. Stan had been given the task of creating *the Supreme Being* to the two young



men. The chemistry was, as they say, a perfect match. Tom and Alec hit it off from the start and became fast friends. As Tom put it, "We found that we had the same interests and that was great. We both admired Ray Harryhausen and we both had dreams of being stop motion animators. One of our favorite movies was **Planet of the Apes**—the costumes and make-up. We would spend hours talking about special effects and comparing notes. It was a great beginning for us both; especially being at Stan's. He would give us the drawings and we interpreted them into sculptures."

It was a great team atmosphere to be in at that time and Tom and Alec became part of the central core of artists at Stan Winston's studio.



Opposite page (top to bottom): *face-hugger*; dog is suited up as **Alien 3** dog-burster for an effect that was ultimately abandoned; Queen *face-hugger* from **Alien 3**. This page: dog suited up; (other photos) **Alien 3** Queen *face-hugger*, *Alien* head.



## The Real School of Special Effects—Making Aliens

After *Terminator*, Jim Cameron came back with a new project...

**ALIENS.** The movie was going to be filmed at *Pinewood Studios* in London, so the whole crew packed up and it was off to the UK for nearly nine months. Tom went first and, after Alec finished up a project back at the studio, he joined them in London. They both knew it was going to be very hard work and they also felt that, if *Aliens* didn't kill them, it would make them both great special effects artists. As Tom put it, "Stan Winston was tough and so was Jim Cameron. They were both professionals and consummate perfectionists, but in a very good way.

Stan pushed his craftsmen to the limit and beyond and it certainly showed in every production."

*Aliens* was certainly a spectacular production with groundbreaking special effects. Tom and Alec were responsible for bringing the *Alien* to life exactly the way Jim Cameron had envisioned. From the pliable *Alien* eggs to the animatronic *face-hugger*. The *Alien* warriors to the *Alien Queen*. And, of course, we could never forget that cute little *chest-burster*. The *Alien* legacy continued and Tom and Alec were right there in the thick of it. As the production was moving forward in the UK, Tom got started on building full size *Alien* heads. Of course, he had the H.R.

Giger drawings to work from but he also had one of the original heads used in the first movie. Someone at *Fox* sent it over and Tom used that as a model to create his own *Alien*.

I was unaware that the original head was actually constructed by H.R. Giger himself. Carlo Rambaldi, (who got the credit) built the sliding toothed tongue mechanism that protruded from the *Alien's* mouth.

"The *Alien Queen* was a real challenge," Tom said. "We actually built a full scale mock-up in the California studio to test the idea of having two stunt people inside the creature while several puppeteers worked the arms and legs outside. Jim

## Amalgamated Dynamics, Inc. Motion Picture Filmography

Motion Pictures:

1. *Alien 3* (Nominated for Academy Award, 1992, SFX)
2. *Alien 4—Alien Resurrection*
3. *Death Becomes Her* (Academy Award, 1992, SFX)
4. *Jumanji*
5. *The Santa Clause*
6. *Michael*
7. *Mortal Kombat*
8. *Sixth Day*
9. *Hollowman*
10. *My Favorite Martian*
11. *Starship Troopers*  
(Nominated for Academy Award, 1992, SFX)
13. *Tremors*
14. *Tremors II*
15. *Terminator*
16. *Predator*
17. *Leviathon*
18. *Warlock*
19. *The X-Files—The Movie*
20. *The Astronaut's Wife*
21. *Wonder Boys*
22. *Wolf*
23. *Demolition Man*
24. *Point Break*
25. *The Grifters*

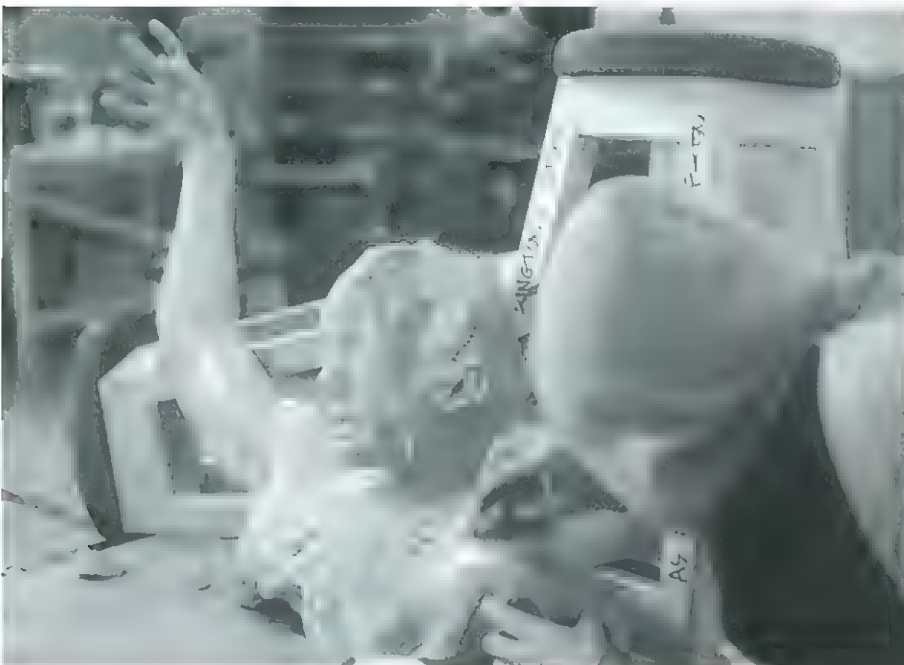
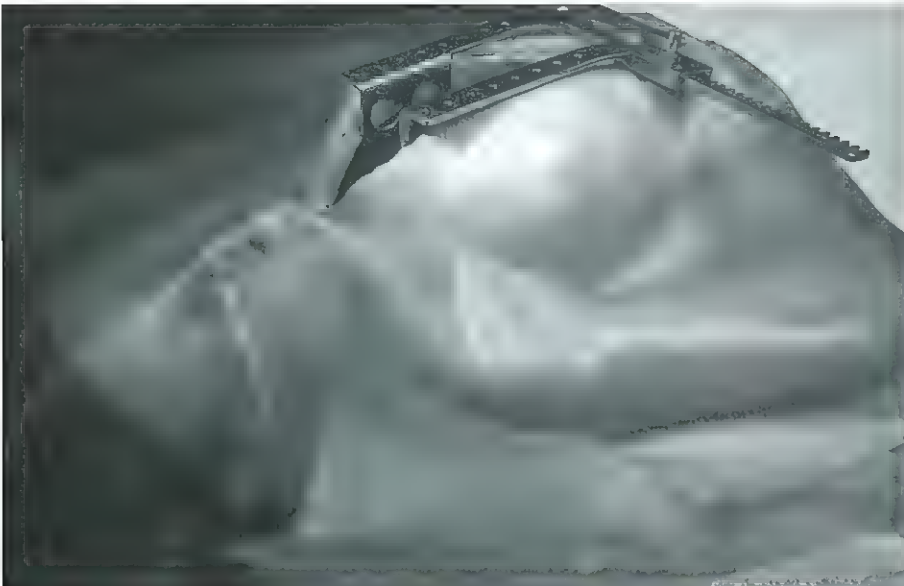


Above: *Newt* corpse for autopsy sequence in *Alien 3*. Below: animatronic skeleton of *face-hugger*.

Opposite page: *Ripley* clone figure for *Alien Resurrection*; Tom Woodruff suited up as *Alien* for *Alien 3*; mutated *Ripley* clone sculpt in progress; *Alien* egg from *Alien Resurrection*.







Cameron and Stan worked out the design for the *Queen* in London and we ended up building the full scale model over there. It really was amazing to learn that the actual *Queen* used in the movie was constructed of black plastic household garbage bags, painted foam and molded prosthetic hands and feet. Of course, on screen she looked a lot more menacing than a *Glad Bag*.

I asked Tom what it was like working with the cast and crew on *Aliens*, especially working closely with Sigourney Weaver. Tom said, "My first big scene with her was in the beginning of the movie, in the hospital scene. I was in charge of creating the *chest-burster* stomach effect for the dream sequence. My first big scene with Sigourney was

being down there under the bed between her legs." (*I can just imagine how that must have felt! LS*)

"Here I was, just a kid of 26 and I'm working with Sigourney Weaver. There was a prosthetic body on the bed over her and I was underneath pushing this thing through a latex membrane. The truth is I was star struck working with her and she was certainly great to work with. Not only is she a great actress, what really struck me is the great deal of interest she takes in wanting to understand and support the work we are doing. I am, to this day, one of her greatest admirers. She is a true professional in every sense of the word."

Of course we know how well she enjoyed working with *Amalgamated Dynamics, Inc.* Tom and Alec would

be instrumental in bringing the *Alien* back to the screen in *Aliens 3* and *4*.

During work on *Aliens*, Alec and Tom began talking seriously about going out on their own. When they returned to the 'States the two immediately began work on *The Predator* with Arnold Schwarzenegger. Stan was indeed a great teacher. Tom and Alec had grown into their own. Stan was delegating more and more work to them until they were working as the chief designers of the studio. The entrepreneurial bug was still burning in them so they asked Stan if they could use the studio while he was in Mexico shooting *Predator*. Stan agreed, and they constructed the sets and characters and worked nights and weekends on their short film, *The Demon with Three Tales*. Once it



was in the can it was time to shop it around. It looked like their hard work was paying off when a studio agreed to produce the short into a feature film. But, before they could strike out on their own, there were still a few more projects in the works at Stan's.

So it was off to Rome for six more months and the movie *Leviathan*. Once that wrapped and they returned to the 'States, Tom and Alec were surprised to learn there was still a lot of interest in their film project. At the same time, Stan wanted to scale down the studio because he was moving into directing feature films. Their last film with the studio was *PumpkinHead*. Alec says, "It's still one of my favorite creatures. I designed the head and the other guys made the body. Of course, Tom was the 'Man in the Monster Suit'. I am amazed how it still gets a huge reaction from the fans."

The timing seemed right for the two FX wizards. They had worked with and learned from Stan Winston at what could only be described as, 'The Real School of Special Effects.' It was graduation day and the two left, with Stan's blessing, to strike out on their own. Yet, as fate would have it (and anyone in Hollywood will tell you) the deal for the feature film, a project that was so sure, fell flat; went

bust; disappeared in a cloud. So here they were, Tom Woodruff, Jr. and Alec Gillis. Two of the most gifted special effects artists in the world, unemployed and without a prospect in sight.

### In Hollywood, No One Can Hear You Scream

Tom said, "We couldn't believe it. Here we were, Alec, his wife with a baby on the way and me and my wife with a newborn. We could just scream, but who in Hollywood is going to hear you? We had to do something and that's when we took on the special effects assignment for the TV show *Monsters*. We rented space in someone else's shop and set to work. After we tallied up our costs and expenses we realized we were earning about the same amount of money we did six years earlier. Talk about taking a step back. Looking back on those early days now, I can truthfully say it was worth it. After we did the work on *Monsters* we did some special effects make-up for a movie called *Warlock*. It was for the final scene. Just a small piece but it was very good and we got noticed."

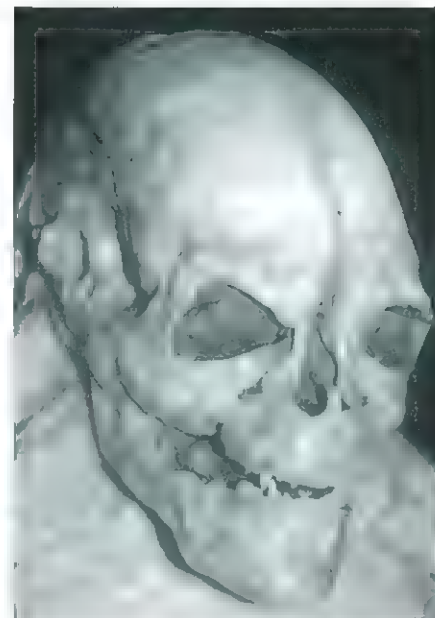
### "We Can Do This!" —The Birth of ADI

The year was 1988. Gale Anne Hurd was producing a new feature film

called *Tremors*. She called Stan Winston who was busy with another project at the time. He recommended Tom and Alec for the movie. It was a great script and the special effects would be fantastic and so, with that movie, *Amalgamated Dynamics, Inc.* was born. The only problem was, the two craftsman still had no shop of their own to work in. They scrambled to rent a larger space in order to create the giant subterranean worm creatures used in the movie. *Tremors*, as it turned out, proceeded to put *Amalgamated Dynamics, Inc.* on the map. Other projects would start pouring in. Feature films, television serial episodes and memorable commercial productions. (See filmography.)

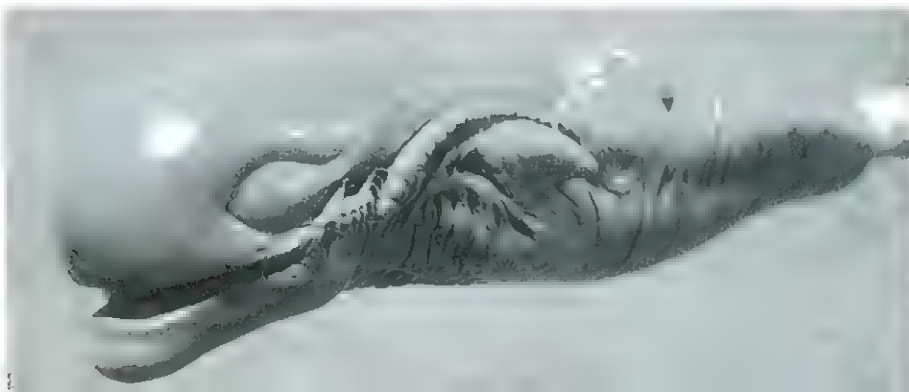
### Aliens, Aliens, and More Aliens: The SFX of Alien III

In 1990-91, work began on *Aliens 3*. This was to be the first of the *Aliens* series for which Alec, Tom and the ADI crew would be responsible for all of the *Alien* effects. It was a big challenge for the young studio but one that they met with the creativity and professionalism for which they have become known. It was off to London again for the filming. Now that they were responsible for creating the special effects, I asked Tom and Alec what was the process they had gone through to continue

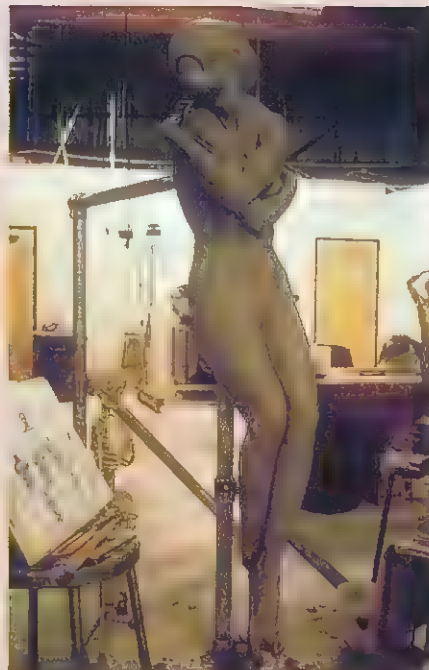
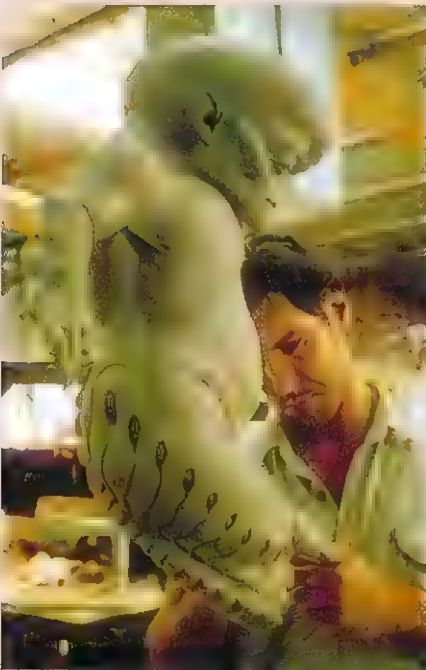


This page: *Alien* sculpt in progress; chest-burster; new-born head from *Alien Resurrection*.

Opposite page: demonstrating the *Alien*'s extending inner jaw; Ripley mutant clone variations; *Alien* head from *Alien Resurrection*.







the *Alien* legacy? Since we had all seen the *Aliens* in two previous films, what could they do to bring a new element of fear, tension and emotion to the creature? I was impressed with their answer.

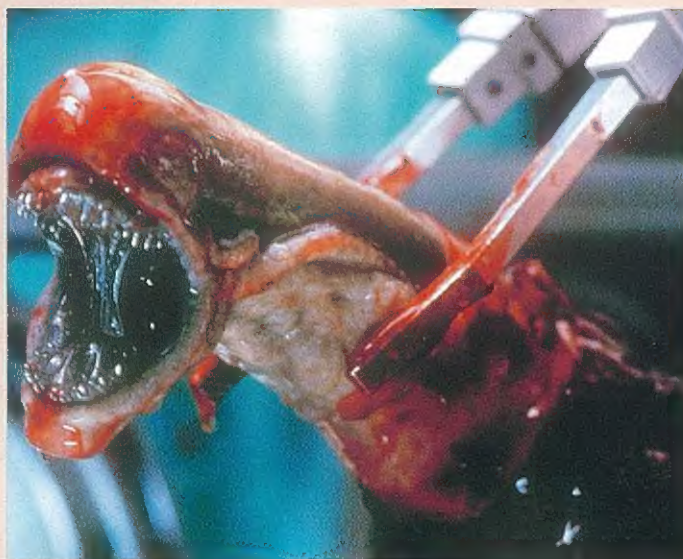
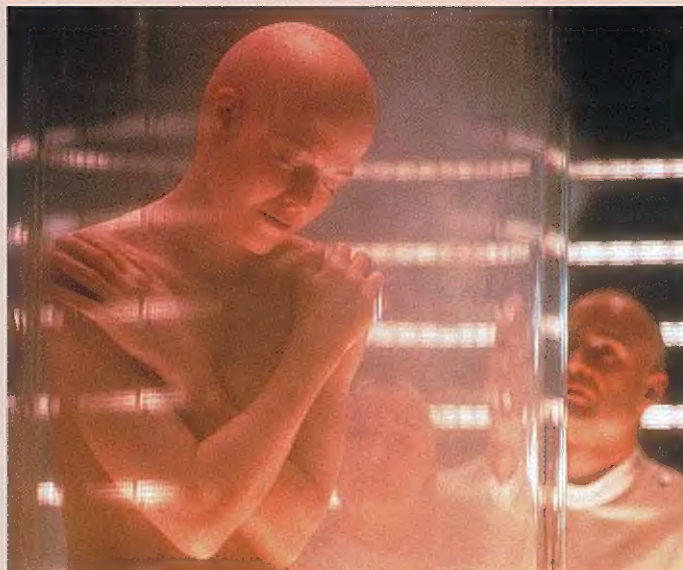
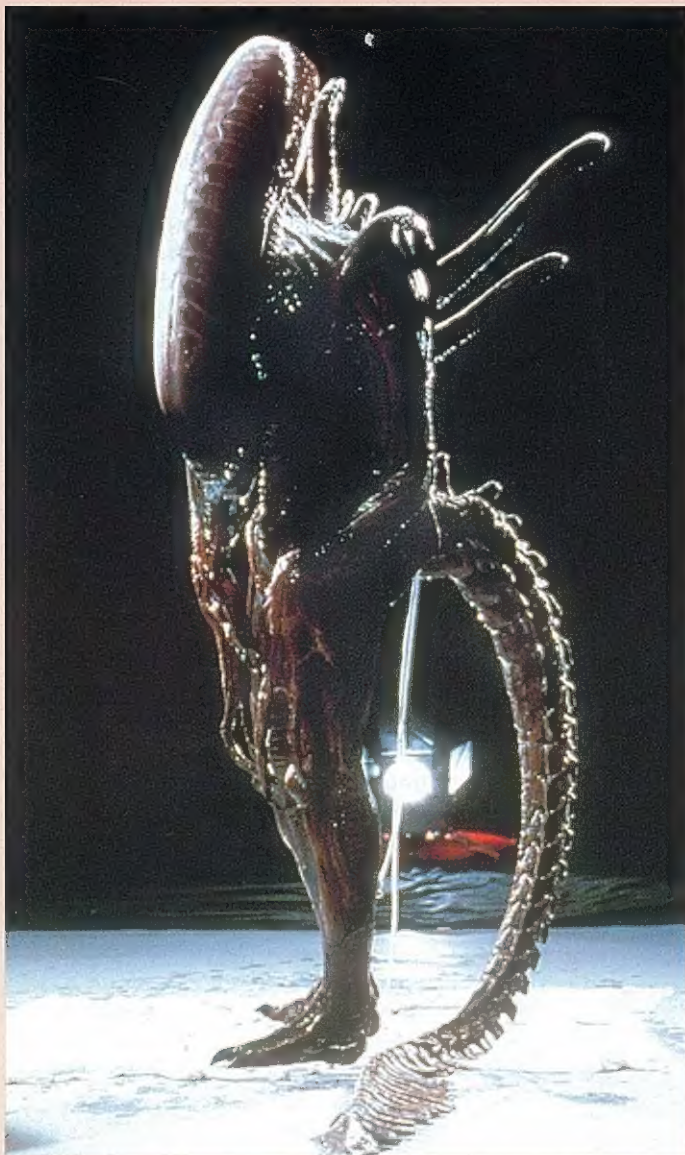
"Our feeling has always been that, on *Alien 3* and *Alien 4*, there is a certain element to the character of the *Alien* that has been well established and we could not improve on that. There are certain things that the audience expects to see in an *Alien* film. For instance, they want to see *Ripley* and Sigourney Weaver is the only person that could play that character. We had to be respectful of what the audience wanted to see and, by the same token, we had to be mindful of what we at *ADI* could accomplish creatively to bring something new to the story. We didn't change the characters, we improved on them by design. I want to emphasize that these were subtle improvements that brought a new element of intensity to the film. The greatest thing we did for the *Alien* was, we gave the creature emotions. I think we brought it life in a way that had not been seen before in the previous films. In fact, I was really moved when Sigourney would take the time to talk to me as a peer. To her I wasn't just some guy in a rubber suit, I was an actor making a contribution to the film. She said she could see how seriously we took the creation of the special effects and admired us for the attention we paid to the craft. To me it was a huge compliment."

Tom and Alec really enjoyed working with David Fincher on the film but it was hard work and long days. Tom would have to withstand hours on end in the *Alien* suit. Fortunately, the suit had a provision for air conditioning between takes. And there were plenty of those. All in all it was a great experience for them both and it certainly shows in the quality of the film.

#### **Aliens Plus One: The SFX of Alien 4—Alien Resurrection**

When director, Jean Pierre Jeunet, was tapped to direct the fourth instalment of the *Alien* legacy, it seemed only fitting that *Amalgamated Dynamics, Inc.* should be chosen to create the special effects. With this film Alec and Tom were faced with an entirely new set of challenges. Sigourney Weaver would reprise her role as *Ripley* and a





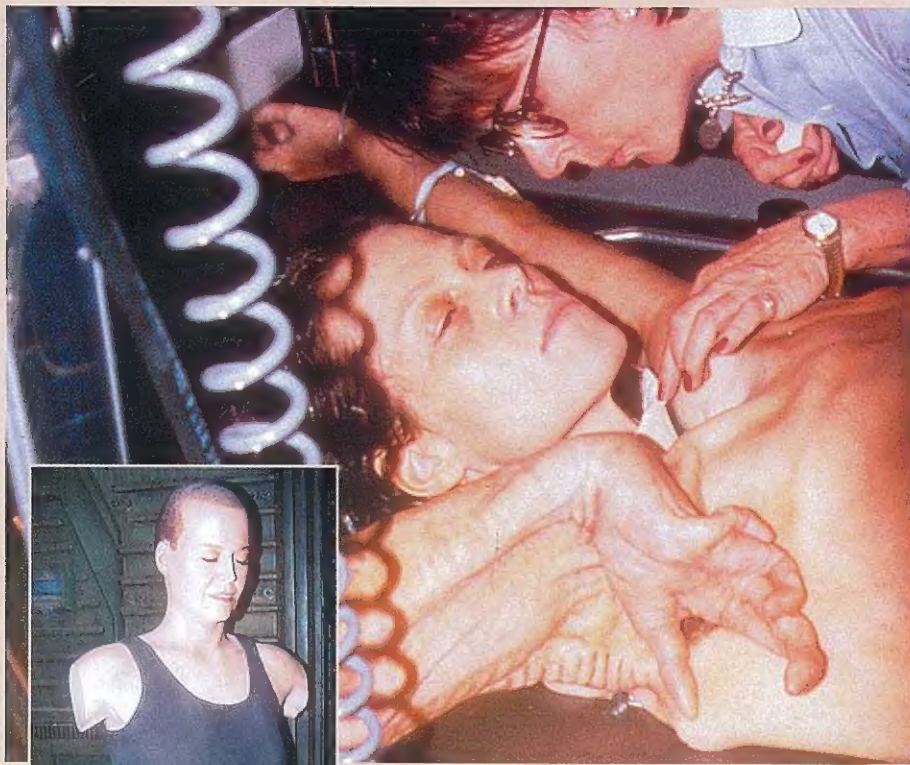
new *Alien* character would be introduced in the movie. Tom stated, "When we first met with the director we had a little trouble trying to understand him. After all, he spoke French and we didn't. At first we communicated through an

interpreter. But soon we found we could understand what he wanted almost without saying a word. Our relationship was really one of artistic communication. He was a great guy to work with and his vision for the special effects gave

us a broad palate with which to work."

Alec and Tom would be busy creating new *Aliens* and, of course, Tom would be reprising his duties as: *The Man in the Alien Suit*.





Opposite page: *Alien* suit from *Alien Resurrection*; Ripley clone in tank; *Alien Resurrection* chest-burster; *Alien* suits under construction; animatronic cable rig; Ripley regeneration No. 2.

This page: Sigourney Weaver has prosthetics applied for clone-room sequence from *Alien Resurrection*; Ripley sculpture; *New Born (BABY)* animatronic.

Constructing the *Alien*, more eggs, a *Queen* face-hugger and chest-burster, prosthetic bodies and likenesses of the failed DNA experiments on Ripley and of course, *BABY*. The *Aliens* started as small maquette sculptures as did *BABY*. From there it was on to the full size creature. Two were made for the film. One was Tom in a suit that was a perfect likeness of the creature and the other was a very complex, animatronic full scale puppet. Radio controlled face-huggers as well as lifelike radio controlled eggs kept everyone at the studio busy for months.

Work on the special effects continued right through filming. From the animatronic likeness of Sigourney Weaver on the operating table in the DNA lab, (that was Sigourney with her head poking through a prosthetic body) to the lifelike upper torso of many of the film's characters who met their fate at the hands (and jaws) of the *Aliens*. As the photos in this article portray, the art, craftsmanship and attention to detail created by Alec Gillis and Tom Woodruff, Jr. and the crew at *ADI* stands as a crowning achievement and testimony to their accomplishments. It is no wonder they have received *Academy Award*<sup>TM</sup> nominations for *Alien 3* and *Starship Troopers* and won this prestigious award for the movie *Death Becomes Her*.

With *Aliens 4*, I wondered if we had seen the last of Ripley and those fearsome, acid-bleeding creatures. I asked Alec and Tom what they thought. The tongue-in-cheek reply was, "Ripley is alive and well and those *Aliens* are still out there somewhere, but you know what they say, *in space, no one can hear you scream!*"

Shots courtesy of ADI and Lee Shargel.  
Alien 3/Alien Resurrection © Twentieth Century Fox

Lee Shargel is an internationally known sci-fi author and screenwriter. His next book, *Works of Wizards—Realms of Fantasy*, tells the complete story of ADI and (with the help of Alec Gillis and Tom Woodruff, Jr.) will be the first book to show every detail of how to create special effects for beginning filmmakers everywhere.

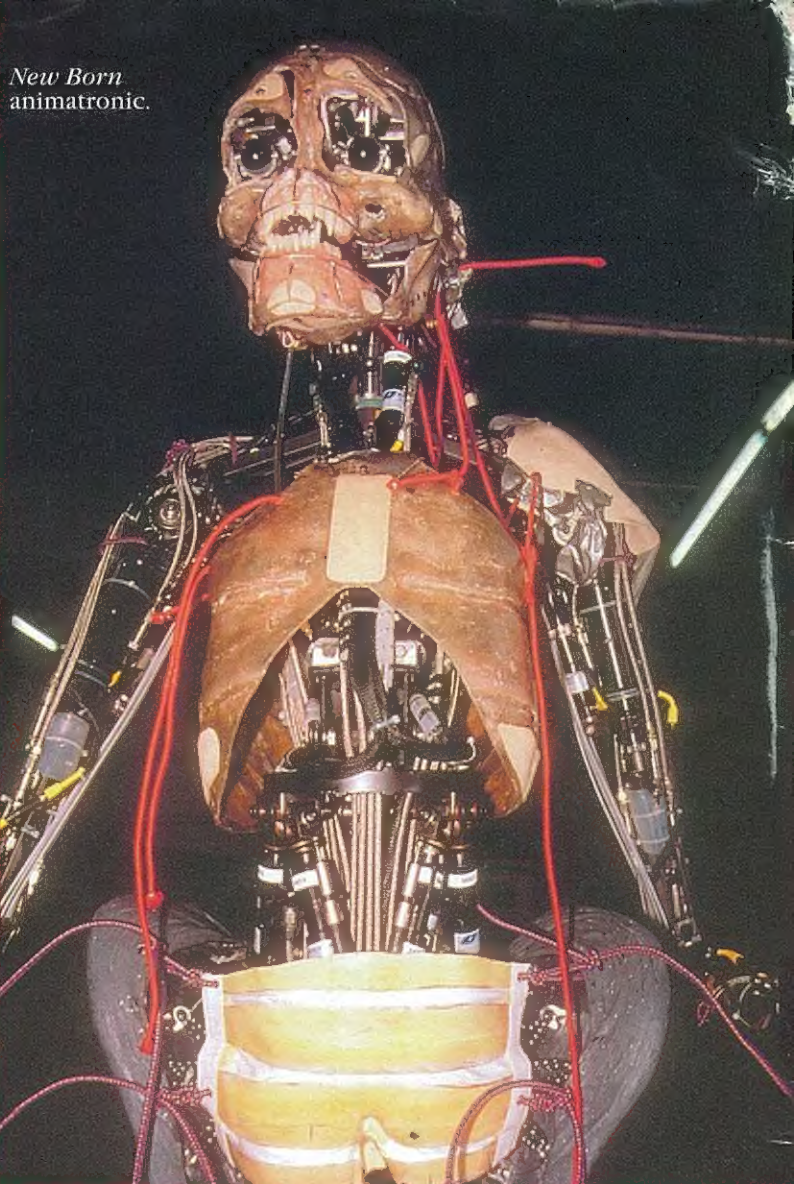
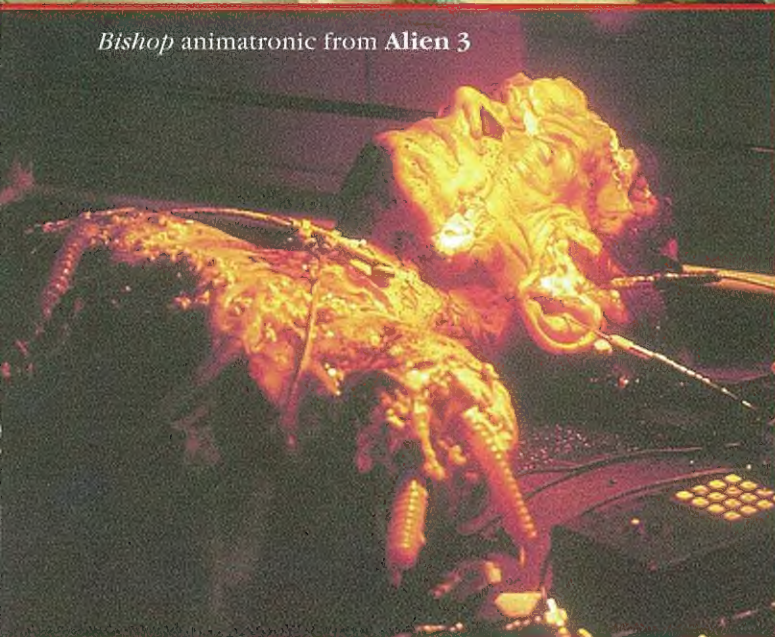




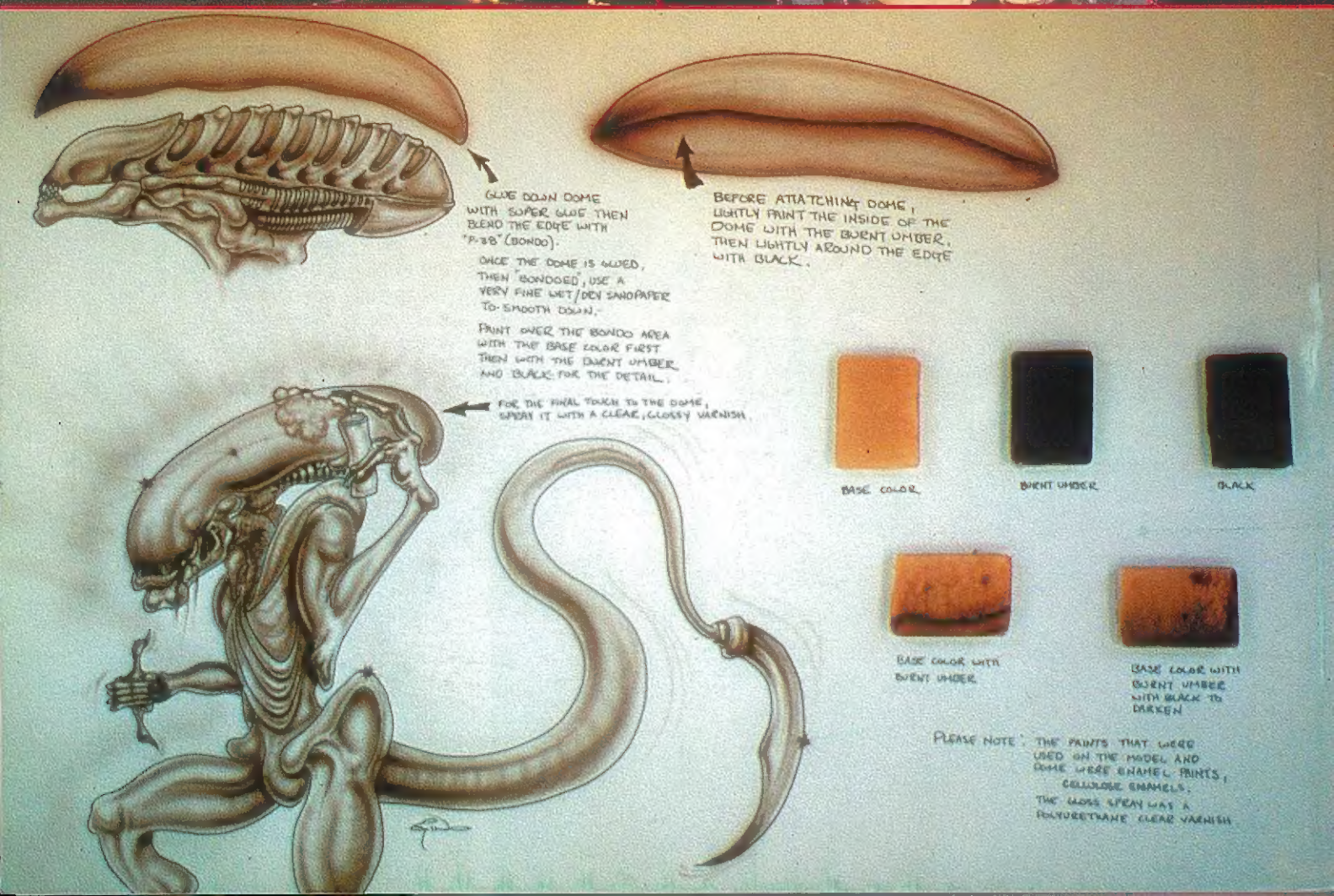


Tail is attached to *Alien* suit.

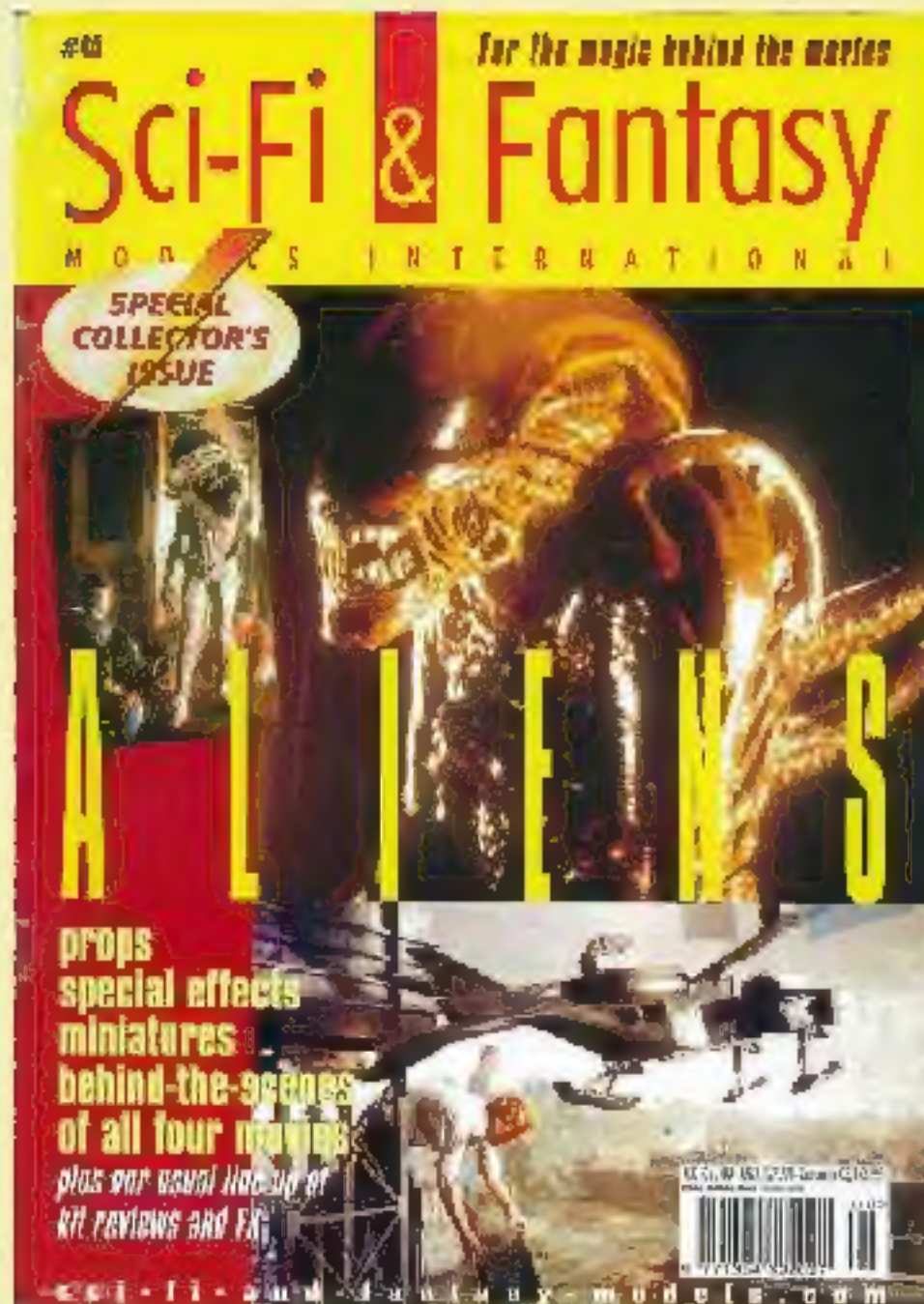
*Bishop* animatronic from *Alien 3*



New Born  
animatronic.







# Sci-Fi & Fantasy Models

## # 45 (2000)

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